Essays on Modern Asian and Australian Literature

Stephen Conlon

Edited by Mabel Lee and Michael Wilding

SYDNEY STUDIES

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Also by Stephen Conlon

Underground Streams: A Journal of Voyages in Reading, Writing, Teaching and Music, Bangkok: I.E.L.E. Press, 2003.

A Fate Worse Than Death: Students' and Teachers' Dialogues on Suicide, Bangkok: Assumption University Press, 2007.

Great Souls: Socrates, Jesus, Confucius, Lao Tzu and the Buddha as Teachers, Bangkok: Assumption University Press, 2008.

Chaos in the Classroom, Bangkok: Assumption University Press, 2009.

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Stephen Conlon

25 February 1955–26 July 2024

Stephen Conlon was born in Sydney, Australia. He was a student of Mosman High School and went on to graduate with three degrees from the Department of English at the University of Sydney: BA (1976), MA Hons 1 (1982), and PhD (1989). He had a lifelong interest in playing the guitar, singing, songwriting and directing contemporary performance, and during the mid-1980s he worked in Sydney entertainment administration as band booker and manager of two famous Sydney pubs: the Sandringham and the Lansdowne. His PhD degree led to the offer of a permanent teaching, research and administration career in Bangkok at Assumption University (1992–2015), and he successfully settled into a challenging overseas career. He was Director of the English Language Centre (1995–1999), Associate Dean and Director of the Institute for English Language Education (1999–2004); and afterwards Director (2004–2008) and Dean (2004–2008) of the Graduate School of English. At Assumption University he supervised to successful completion 2 PhD students and 48 MA research students.

He was founder and Editor of *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society* (2011–2015), and also founder and Supervising Editor of *The English Teacher: An International Journal* (1994–2004). His authored books include *Underground Streams*: *A Journal of Voyages in Reading*, *Writing, Teaching and Music* (2004); *A Fate Worse than Death: Students' and Teachers' Dialogues on Suicide* (2007); *Great Souls: Socrates, Jesus, Confucius, Lao Tzu and the Buddha as Teachers* (2008); *Chaos in the Classroom* (2009); and *The Heroic Student: A Reading of* A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (2010).

On retiring from Assumption University he had the opportunity to travel in Asia and Europe but in very recent years an invasive illness invaded his person. Nonetheless he remained always cheerful and positive for his wife, Namtip, whom he had married in Bangkok on 24 March 2000, and for their young teenage son Dylan. He regularly created visual documentation of their family life for Namtip and Dylan to keep and to cherish, and he also posted it on YouTube for his friends in various parts of the world.

In the very last years of his life he sought solace in creative writing, music, singing, performance, experimental theatre and film. This recent work is registered on ReverbNation.com under the brand name "Steve Conlon *Sanctuaries*: Indie / Gothic / Spiritual". The following undated titles were probably filmed / recorded during 2023 or 2024:

(1) “Back with the Tide”; (2) “Labyrinth Heart”; (3) “Silences”; (4) “Gothic Serenade”; (5) “Pretty Girl”; (6) “Bliss”; (7) “To Stevie”; (8) “Mourning Orpheus”; (9) “Before the Rain Comes”; (10) “And I Saw Satan Falling Like Lightning”. He has also created an experimental film: *Déjà Vécu: The Pythia in the Cave of Trophonius*.

One day I received a garbled email from Stephen saying that he was being wheeled into surgery and probably would not survive. He asked me to publish a book of his collected essays. Some time later Namtip emailed to advise me of Stephen’s death and the elaborate funeral arrangements in Bangkok. I consulted Professor Michael Wilding, who had supervised Stephen’s MA and PhD theses at the University of Sydney, and we decided to co-edit the present volume to commemorate and to celebrate Stephen’s extraordinary insights on language and literature, and on the striking differences in literary expression in Eastern and Western cultures.

The book *Essays on Modern Asian and Australian Literature* by Stephen Conlon that Michael Wilding and I have co-edited will be the second title in the *Sydney Studies in Society and Culture, second series*.

Michael and I express here our profound gratitude and thanks to Dr Sue Wiles for subjecting our text to a final rigorous scrutiny.

Mabel Lee

23 June 2025

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The Individual Writer's Voice: Gao Xingjian's *Aesthetics and Creation*

Abstract

Gao Xingjian offers a way beyond the currently prevalent ideologies that seem to dominate literature and literary criticism. He does this by creating major works that offer an aesthetic based on a return to the humanist traditions of literary art and the infusion of Buddhist and Taoist Ways to Enlightenment. His achievement is to blend Eastern and Western perspectives or perceptions that enrich each other and so make possible truly original art.

This essay discusses Gao's views on art by arguing that once another, better, way to think and create can be enunciated, we may recognize the passing of what is currently often touted as the only correct or valid way to read and write literature in our universities and in the literary market. If it is possible to be original and cogent in expressing such an alternative, then perhaps we may re-shift our focus back onto the ways we have been writing before the advent of Postmodernist and Poststructuralist ideologies. In so doing, we may also return the writer's voice to the discussion of literature and so re-establish the communication networks we need for great art which dialogues with us as individuals to flourish. Once this is achieved, a new renaissance may be possible that, in Buddhist terms, brings back to life what we thought was dead: literature is not exhausted; the author is not dead; art that sincerely represents the individual's life and mind in verisimilar ways remains the most pressing need in this hyperreal age we have been told by literary ideologies we live in. The form or style of this essay is offered as an alternative to the current turgid and unreadable ways of writing espoused in poststructuralist academic circles that have only resulted in a new poverty of literary criticism and of language. We may need to re-learn how to discuss literature in our own voices: Gao's voice in his *Aesthetics and Creation* is an exemplary way to do so.

Keywords: Gao Xingjian, Chan Buddhism, postmodernism, tradition, communication, aesthetics, creativity, voice, pronouns, perception, renaissance, literary criticism

But hell can endure for only a limited period and life will begin again one day.
(Camus: 1951: 241)

1

The impetus for this essay comes from a realization that Gao Xingjian has been largely ignored by critics. This is despite his having written *Soul Mountain* (1990, translated into English in 2000), the most challenging and perhaps most difficult great novel since James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1942). One startling example of such silence is Stucky (2010) whose postmodernist metatextual deconstruction of modern Chinese novels totally ignores Gao whose work is not mentioned once. While Joyce's *Ulysses* remained a mystery for critics until Stuart Gilbert (1930) published the schema Joyce provided to him, Gao has responded to his readers by offering a series of talks and essays about his art in all its manifestations. Many of these have been collected and translated by Mabel Lee in *Aesthetics and Creation* (2012). In this book, we may have some of the keys to Gao's art.

If, as Gao suggests, great art confronts or challenges life, and by implication its audience, we should not expect to find in it trite tropes and worn out ideas that sound like the popular or trendy views that usually predominate in a milieu until a great work comes along and changes everything. Instead, we can only expect to be challenged and surprised by it. One way he challenges us is in his view of art as a record of the creations achieved by individual human souls whose truthful attempts to write about the human condition survive the test of time and communicate with us to this day. This record transcends time, space, cultures and languages to form what he calls a history of the soul (Gao: 2012: 203). For a humanist who is familiar with the traditions of art, this argument should not come as a surprise or a shock. In *Great Souls* (2007), I have argued that the ideas of Socrates, Jesus, the Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tzu are deeply compatible in many ways. In fact, this is how tradition as a force always works: when we are aware of the voices of the past, we hear in the present their continued relevance in the dialogues others are now having which re-voice or reverberate those views. As Byron the romantic rebel knew well, the past never passes away. Voices inside the stream of art that create lasting works are never inherently incompatible with one another, although the poverty of our thinking may make it seem that they are. Instead, we can hear them in dialogue with each other, much as E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) envisaged the great novelists living and working in the same room. One such voice that seems to be invisibly but audibly present in Gao's work is that of Albert Camus.

In *The Rebel* (1951), Camus, like Gao, rejects Nietzsche's ethics:

> Man can allow himself to denounce the total injustice of the world and then demand a total justice which he alone will create. But he cannot affirm the total hideousness of the world. To create beauty, he must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects. Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it. Nietzsche could deny any form of transcendence, whether moral or divine, in saying that transcendence drove one to slander this world and this life. But perhaps there is a living transcendence, of which beauty carries the promise, which can make this mortal and limited world preferable to and more appealing than any other. Art thus leads us back to the origins of rebellion, to the extent that it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually promises, but which the artist presents and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history. We shall understand this better in considering the art form whose precise aim is to dive into the stream of the ceaseless change of things in order to give it the style that it lacks; in other words, the novel. (Camus: 1951: 224)

Here, Camus's emphasis on the need for beauty, the artist's disputing of reality, the limits of Nietzsche's ethics, a transcendent quality in art, the novel as a form whose "aim is to dive into the stream of the ceaseless change of things", are likewise key aspects of Gao's aesthetics. The two artists' attitudes towards art are similar in these ways because they are drawing on perspectives that are an integral part of the vital traditions or life forces of art. Unlike Camus who comes to a view of the stream from a Western understanding of the stream of consciousness, Gao brings a Chan Buddhist perspective to this view that helps him to see other aspects of it. Similarly, while Camus may be labeled an existentialist along with Sartre, there is no way of seeing his *The Outsider* (1942) as disputing reality in the same way that Sartre does in *Nausea* (1938). While both existentialist writers confront or dispute reality, they see different things and represent those things in different ways because they tell the truth about what they actually perceive. So too with Gao whose reality in China and in the mind of specific individuals located there offers different ways of challenging the world of his experience that leads him into the mind and how we exist in it. As Camus hints in his allusion to Voltaire's *Candide* (1750) and the search for the best of all possible worlds, which is linked to Johnson's *Rasselas* (1750) where a similar search is undertaken but with different results, there is a sense of quest in all literature that explores ways of living in a contested and therefore problematical world. Such a quest is inherent in the human psyche while the perceptions we attain are different because each writer sees and experiences things

differently. But, the experiences have one important similarity: they are told truthfully, sincerely, with a concern for the quality of life for the individual being portrayed.

In recent years, we seem to have lost contact with Camus's, and for that matter with Sartre's, actual voices and ideas. But the traditions they and those that have written before them have kept alive remain in contact in the underground stream of ideas that we need to reestablish communication with if we are to talk with each other as equals in a truly dialogical way about art, language and many other topics. The problem is that these voices have been drowned out in most Western approaches to art and life that seem to deny the existence of living traditions or art. For a student or critic who comes to Gao's work with preconceptions about art as an abstract sign system that only talks about language and that has no past or future because it is simply a language game we play, then Gao's work may seem incomprehensible, or even anathema and so to be rejected. But such a negative response would be intellectually dishonest and irresponsible: we have to confront that which seems alien to us if we are to learn about ourselves as human beings. This means that we have to open our minds to other ideas that seem to challenge the way we think now. If these other ideas offer a better way of seeing things, then we may change how we think. We must do this once we accept that a work offers truthful insights into the only thing that matters—who we are as human beings—which our present ways of thinking cannot offer to us.

This is what Gao sets out to argue in *Aesthetics and Creation* (2012) by using his own art, the only art he has concrete experience with as a creator, to show us that there are other ways of thinking about art. In following him on his quest, this essay seeks to recreate one reader's experience of his work in detail. It does so by giving Gao's voice prominence in the discussions. After having traveled through his book and hopefully seen things through his eyes and in his mind, we may be able to make informed judgments on the value of his quest based on what we have learned along the way. For this reason, I make no apologies for the length of this essay in which much ground will have to be covered in concrete terms if we are actually to understand Gao's art in its complexity and richness. If this seems to confront or challenge the reader, then so be it: unless we are willing to experience such issues in our own reading experience we will never be willing to confront the issues raised by the artist. In this way, we gain a sense of the artist by experiencing his art as he intends it to be experienced: in a verisimilar way.

From a humanist's perspective, one of the great lessons literature, and by extension the criticism of literature, teaches is that all movements, styles, and ideologies of art will pass: there will always be light at the end of the tunnel for those who disagree with the

prevailing popular trends of any time. Gao Xingjian seems to be one of those who are announcing the passing of the current dominant, even totalizing, trend in literature: the end of the postmodernist moment along with the attendant academic ideology of poststructuralism. That this current trend is reaching the Asian context may be illustrated by Zhou Weihui's novel *Shanghai Baby* (1999), which has won her international acclaim as an Asian writer who has learned the current Western language or discourse tropes and has managed to represent voices of modern youth in China who are finding that the West truly is the best. She begins her novel by announcing herself to the world, a very egocentric thing to do:

> My name is Nikki but my friends all call me Coco after Coco Chanel, a French lady who lived to be almost ninety. She's my idol, after Henry Miller. Every morning when I open my eyes I wonder what I can do to make myself famous. It's become my ambition, almost my raison d'être, to burst upon the city like fireworks. (Zhou: 1999: 1)

To use poststructuralist terms, her identity is Western, as in her names and heroes. It may be innocent of her to announce her worship of two very incompatible "idols" (even if a postmodernist would see no problem in such a conflation of ideas), but the rest of the novel seeks to bring these two together. Later, disaffected by her casual romances with a string of men, she consults a psychologist, David Wu, who informs her that because of her conflicting identities, she is doomed to live a chaotic life:

> He told me that the clash between my natures as a female and as a writer doomed me to chaos. Artists have a decided tendency toward weakness, dependence, contradiction, naïveté, masochism, narcissism, Oedipal complex, and so forth. (Zhou: 1999: 35)

This sounds like a sophomoric catalogue of poststructuralist themes in Culture Theory that she accepts without question. She adds these to her identities of Coco Chanel and Henry Miller. She then admits that she wants to forget her past:

> A lot of life can be assigned to oblivion, and as far as I'm concerned, the more unpleasant one's experiences, the faster they're forgotten. (Zhou: 1999: 36)

The pop psychologist then confirms her aim: "That's why you'll be a good writer. A writer buries the past with her words . . ." (Zhou: 1999: 36). There is nothing satirical about this

exchange. It is offered at face value. The question of Coco's identity remains the main thread of the novel until in the last sentences she is confronted by an old woman:

> "Who are you?" she asked in a low voice. My heart fluttered. A feeling of tenderness and bitterness engulfed me, and for a moment I didn't know how to answer this tired and helpless old woman. Who am I, indeed? Who am I? (Zhou: 1999: 283)

The question, repeated, is the answer: you are Coco and you are Zhou Weihui; the hero and this novel are who you are. You have fulfilled the promise or goal announced in your beginning chapter and burst onto the city with your pyrotechnic postmodern life and art. This novel is about itself and how it was written; it is a metafiction for a postmodernist. Your identity has been confirmed. A postmodernist reader-response to the quality of this novel would not progress to an analysis of the novel as a work of art. Instead, it would probably stop with an assertion that it is culturally significant as a modern voice in Chinese literature. It has succeeded in what it set out to do; it has played the game of literature and said very little. And the little it has said is as a sign of postmodernity in Western tropes that only confirm the identity of the writer as "new".

It is a sad fact that some students in the faculty where I work have wanted to use this novel as the basis of a thesis on language (not on literature *per se*). But when I have suggested to them, and to other Chinese students, that they consider writing on Gao Xingjian's work, they respond either with indifference or horror that he is just a political writer who is stuck in the Cultural Revolution. Not that they have actually read Gao: more often than not, they have only read about him in the press. This reaction, too, is a sad reality: a postmodern-minded reader doesn't have to actually read the text; he or she knows it from the press metacritically and in a hyperreal form.

Zhou's text has been presented here as a way of contextualizing the discussion I want to have about Gao Xingjian's art. Unlike Wei Hui (as her name is deformed in the Western publication of the English translation of her novel), Gao is a serious artist who offers a way out of this postmodern malaise that I hope is apparent in the brief discussion of *Shanghai Baby* and its reception by Chinese students who are ignorant of Gao's work.

The pitfalls of playing the postmodernist game are apparent to Gao, as they should be to any serious artist or critic who is aware of the traditions of literature and art that have not passed or died:

> The postmodern epochal signs announcing the death of the writer most likely have ended, and the literary revolutions that failed to terminate writers have instead come to an end. However, the problem is simply how literature will deal with the modern individual's existential conditions and the dilemmas confronting literature. Will the writer have the courage to present humanity's true predicament, and have writers found a more precise mode of literary expression? (Gao: 2012: 217–218)

This is a bold statement. Gao announces the death of postmodernism (and by extension its literary critical twin poststructuralism), and sets out to confront the reality of the human condition that has been ignored in recent ideologies that have become an abstract system of signs without human content. The present essay seeks to explicate Gao's answers to the questions he asks here and to evaluate their lucidity, relevance and implications for the novel after the wave of poststructuralism finally passes in academe. Once clear alternatives to the present apparently totalizing ideas that haunt academic discourse and literature are shown to exist, then we may see that what we are currently doing is not the only, or even the best, way we can think and act.

By framing his point in terms of the need to rethink the value of literature and by implication of literary criticism, Gao is re-voicing the point made by the English poet, artist and rebel William Blake. In "Jerusalem" (a poem he worked on for over a decade and published in 1820), Blake encapsulates the task of the artist: "I must Create a System, or be enslaved by another Man's. I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create."

Here, like Gao, Blake is in rebellion against the constrictions of formal or accepted spelling, punctuation and orthography as a way of announcing his rebellion, as well as against the dominant ways of seeing that he identified with Newton's science. His point needs to be kept in mind whenever we try to confront great art: the artist must have his own vision and way of doing things if he is to create anything meaningful that will last and so communicate with others in later times. Blake only sold a few copies of "Jerusalem" in his own lifetime; commercially, he was a failure. But it did not worry or concern him. He had to follow his own voice. This is what great, significant artists have always done. In English literature, such a spirit is perhaps first voiced by Philip Sidney in the opening of his sonnet cycle *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) when he dialogues with his Muse about what he should write of Stella and the Muse responds: "look in thy heart, and write".

Not that there is much evidence that current literary critical modes would accept the validity of the voices I have been quoting against the postmodern approach to the study of

literature. They would probably subscribe to Umberto Eco's attempt to impose the interpretations of the super-reader (model reader) on a text by enumerating what such a reader can make the text signify without any recourse to historical or aesthetic criteria from the past that view literature at least in part from the perspective of its creator: the artist. Eco's mechanistic and depersonalized view of the writer and reader may be glimpsed in the way he frames his theory of communication:

> In a communicative process, there are a sender, a message, and an addressee. Frequently, both sender and addressee are grammatically manifested by the message: "I tell you that . . ." Dealing with messages with a specific indexical purpose, the addressee is supposed to use the grammatical clues as referential indices (/I / must designate the empirical subject of that precise instance of utterance, and so on). The same can happen even with very long texts, such as a letter or private diary, read to get information about the writer. But as far as a text is focused *qua* text, and especially in cases of texts conceived for a general audience (such as novels, political speeches, scientific instructions, and so on, the sender and the addressee are present in the text, not as mentioned poles of the utterance, but as 'actantial roles' of the sentence . . . (see Jakobson, 1957). In these cases, the author is textually manifested only (i) as a recognizable style or textual idiolect—this idiolect frequently distinguishing not an individual but a genre, a social group, a historical period (Theory, 3:7:6); (ii) as mere actantial roles . . . (iii) as an illocutionary signal (/I swear that/) or as a perlocutionary operator (/suddenly something horrible happened . . . /). Usually this conjuring up of the "ghost" of the sender is ordered to a symmetrical conjuring up of the "ghost" of the addressee (Kristeva, 1970) . . . In the following paragraphs I shall renounce the use of the term /author / if not as a mere metaphor for textual strategy and I shall use the term Model Reader in the terms stipulated above. In other words, the Model Reader is a textually established set of felicity conditions (Austin, 1962) to be met in order to have a macrospeech act (such as a text is) fully actualized. (Eco: 1979: 10–11)

Eco's evidence is only other people's theories that he seems to stitch together, often inappropriately, as in the case of Austin's Speech Act ideas which do not address the narrative issues Eco applies it to. The simplistic model of communication Eco evokes cannot accommodate the sociolinguistic realities of communication networks I have discussed

elsewhere (Conlon: 2012). This long passage has been quoted here to contextualize the dehumanizing Theory that Gao's art is offered as an alternative to in what follows.

In a similar vein, Barthes's (1968) contribution to this game is to announce the death of the author; a dogma taken up uncritically by most students who are only exposed to poststructuralist reader responses, where all responses are valid in so far as anyone can have any theory of a work accepted based only on the ingenuousness of the reading. Barthes's idea is basically an unacknowledged re-expression of Wimsatt's (1954) idea of "The Intentional Fallacy" in New Criticism. However, in place of the pronouncements offered in Poststructuralism, we need evidence based on coherent argument and actual words spoken or written by those we study or write about. The proof of an argument cannot be that it simply is supported by another theory when that other theory is based on yet another theory. This is the trap of the infinite regress where we can never find the actual data or source for what we assert.

In place of literary art and language, we are left with a hodgepodge of theories that have no evidence to test them against. Over the past few decades, as these theories have taken hold in academe, we seem to have lost sight of literature as an experience of the world that we confront whenever we read or write creative literature. We seem to have forgotten what we have been doing for millennia in terms of literary art. Instead of reading literature, we now seem to only read about literature in hyperreal meta-texts that masquerade as criticism. I have discussed this trend elsewhere (Conlon: 2009: 266–294) so I will not rehearse this point again here except to say that we need to refocus on the questions we have dismissed.

The question needs to be re-asked: What is literature? That is the big question that Gao Xingjian sets out to answer in *Aesthetics and Creation* (2012). The question has been asked before. The words of the question are the title of Sartre's (1947) essay in which he argues for a literature that engages with society and reality: it is a literature of engagement. However, this answer seems to have been overturned by more recent critics who, subscribing to a postmodernist view, disengage the writer and the work from reality. They see the writer as dead and the text as a flat surface that is only an agglomeration of signs.

Against this disengagement, Gao suggests we need to confront the individual's existential situation by finding and voicing the individual's inner voice that affirms his or her existence as a human being. This is not a return to the past understood as a rejection of the present. Instead, through his Chinese roots, Gao is bringing a new (forgotten) voice into literature; one that includes the perceptions and representations of the world through the eyes and ears of Chan Buddhism, the literature of the Tang and Song Dynasties, and the idea that

we must confront what is happening in the real world we live in. In this, he seeks to refocus attention on what has been overlooked or dismissed in contemporary Western aesthetics: the plight of the individual artist who is at odds with the prevailing commercial, political and theoretical views of art.

2

At the end of his latest book, *Aesthetics and Creation* (2012), Gao Xingjian hints at what has been present in his approach throughout the book and his life as an underground stream when He mentions a Chan monk who showed the way to confront the self by setting it free:

> . . . the monk Huineng of Tang China also provided a profound understanding of the self that entailed eradicating the control of the self and resorting to observation. (Gao: 2012: 233)

The last paragraph in the book links these two tasks to our present condition and how literature offers a vital way of practicing self-control and observation. This passage sums up the basic arguments Gao has been developing throughout the book:

> To flee is thus to save oneself, but even more difficult to flee are the dark shadows of the inner mind of the self, and if one lacks sufficient awareness of the self, one will undoubtedly first be buried in the hell of the self; right until death may one not see the light. The hell of the self is delusion that can suffocate and destroy a person. However, literature can serve as a sobering medication that will arouse the conscience, promote deep introspection, and help one observe all the phenomena of the universe, as well as awaken people to investigate the darkness of the inner mind. Literature is helped by people's life experiences, but its insights far surpass all prognostications. (Gao: 2012: 235)

If the reader has some experience with the ways of Chan (Chinese Zen) Buddhism, then the way Gao writes and speaks will sound familiar. Chan is not about telling people what to think. In fact, as Gao observes, "Chan cannot be spoken" (Gao: 2012: 126). The problem for a critic who tries to bring out the roots of Gao's ideas in Chan terms is that such a procedure would be an unChan thing to do: the reader or student is meant to attain insights him or herself. This means that while much of what Gao says of art comes from Chan, he chooses deliberately not to spell out the connections. We feel the presence of these ideas below the

surface of the texts in a way that helps us follow the stream of his thoughts as they flow from one point to another. To avoid a heavy-handed simplistic reading of Gao, I discuss some basic ideas of Chan in this section to prepare the reader's and my own mind to internalize them and join them in his or her own consciousness while reading this essay. In doing this, I am evoking a passage from *The Sutra of Hui Neng* (Humphreys and Wong: 1998), more commonly known as *The Platform Sutra*. In Chapter 2 of that work, Hui Neng advises that:

> . . . the mind should be framed in such a way that it will be independent of external and internal objects, at liberty to come and go, free from attachment . . . (Humphreys and Wong: 1998: Chapter 2)

In this freedom or Prajna, "our mind works freely without any hindrance" so that "we are in a position to know our own mind" and so to know without attachments. These attachments are the delusions we are captivated by:

> . . . the wisdom of Enlightenment is inherent in every one of us. It is because of the delusion under which our mind works that we fail to realize it ourselves . . . (Chapter 2)

With this freedom, we realize that "The capacity of the mind is as great as that of space". By reading *The Diamond Sutra* we can practice the wisdom we need to attain this purified state of mind so that the six Vijnanas (aspects of consciousness) will not be polluted when they pass through the six senses. What *The Diamond Sutra* explains is that we should not cling to false notions or forms (Laksanas) such as the concepts of an ego, a personality, a being and a life. By clinging to such notions as names, we lose our freedom to move or flow in the river or stream that leads to Nirvana. *The Sutra Pitaka* (Bodi: 2000) enumerates these senses as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. It also explains that a Vijnana is a specific moment when we are conscious and that these moments flow together as a continual succession of conscious states to create continuity within our life now and between our various past and future lives. This is our karma understood as our tradition.

For Hui Neng, harnessing these thoughts is the key to wisdom: "A foolish passing thought makes one an ordinary man, while an enlightened second thought makes one a Buddha" (Humpreys and Wong 1998: Chapter 2). To achieve this second thought as a Vijnana, we need to understand that we think in two stages: we have awareness and then perception of our awareness. In Chinese, the terms *wu nian* ("no thought") and *bu ran*

("unstained") explain that we must be detached from our thoughts so that they do not harm or pollute us.

When Gao's use of pronouns in his art and essays to dialogue with himself and his characters is understood in terms of Buddhist approaches to the act of perception, we may realize that there is much more going on in his narrative modes than meets the passing thought's eye: a first reading of his work may leave the reader with a sense of difficulty. However, when his art is read in terms of Chan Buddhism, we see in our second thought that he is deliberate and clear in what he does. In a similar way, his discussions of his works may be read in terms of the need to look at things twice, free from the attachments of the ideologies we may bring with our first reading. In *Aesthetics and Creation*, his emphasis on freeing himself from the ideologies of art, the market and politics is intended as purification of the mind in order to help the reader see his art on his own terms in what may be understood as his "second thoughts". An awareness of the flow of Vijnanas also helps the reader understand the way Gao's narratives flow and explain how this flow is an important part of his understanding of the traditions of literature and art as never-ending flows of individual consciousness in confrontation with the world.

When we read *Soul Mountain* (2000) with these thoughts in mind, we see that each chapter has no clearly marked contextual beginning or ending, that time and experience flows, and that there are no names of the narrator(s) or characters met along the Way. In place of the "life" of the narrator, we have the stream of his experiences as he moves towards enlightenment without judging those he encounters along the way. We hear in the novel (and elsewhere in Gao's art) echoes of what he says in his essays and talks. These repetitions are intentional as second thoughts that constitute the ecosystem of Gao's oeuvre as it continues to flow.

In Chapter 52 of *Soul Mountain* the writer or narrator addresses himself as "you" to explain himself to himself:

> In this lengthy soliloquy you are the object of what I relate, a myself that listens intensely to me—you are simply my shadow. As I listen to myself and you, I let you create a she, because you are like me and also cannot bear the loneliness and have to find a partner for your conversation . . . But let others discuss or debate such matters, they are of no consequence for I who am engrossed in my journey or you who are on your spiritual journey. Like me, you wander wherever you like. As the distance increases there is a converging of the two until unavoidably you and I merge and are

> inseparable. At this point there is a need to step back and to create space. This space is he. He is the back of you after you have turned around and left me . . . I have established for myself this way of sequencing which can be thought of as a sort of logic or karma. Ways of sequencing, logic or karma have been established by people in this vast unordered world in order to affirm oneself, so why shouldn't I invent my own sequencing, logic or karma? . . . Philosophy in the end is an intellectual game . . . Fiction is different from philosophy because it is the product of sensory perceptions. (Gao: 2000: 312–315)

All of the issues raised in this passage resurface in Gao's essays. This "sequencing" emphasizes that Gao aesthetics and his explanations of it come out of his art practices. In this way, his essays are an integral part of his art; they are not dangling bits that seem out of place in his oeuvre.

In this section, I want to bring together some other Chan voices, much as in traditional Chinese literature. For example, in *The Mustard Seed Garden* (Barnstone and Chou: 1996) a compiler would bring together excerpts from a wide variety of sources to offer different perspectives on a single topic. In terms of Chinese painting, this aesthetic form is hinted at by Zhao Zhishen in *The Record of Talks about Dragons* (Barnstone and Chou: 1996) when he warns:

> A magic dragon might coil or stretch out, and it changes without fixed shape. Although you perceive it vaguely—just one scale or one claw—you know its tail and head are there. But if you restrict yourself to what you see and take that as the whole dragon, then the painters and sculptors will have only scornful words to say to you. (Barnstone and Chou: 1996)

Offering excerpts from a variety of texts in no particular order is in itself a Taoist way of stimulating the aesthetic thoughts of readers who are invited to combine them in their own thoughts and so to give shape to their understanding. This is what Lu Ji says in his poem "The Art of Writing":

> Let different cadences be used in turn like five colours in harmony, and although they vanish and reappear inconstantly and though it seems a hard path to climb, if you know the basic laws of order and change your thoughts like a river will flow in channels. (Barnstone and Chou: 1996)

To turn to the Chan texts, in "True Record of Baiyun", Baiyun explains to a student:

> What can be said but not practiced is better not said. What can be practiced but not spoken is better not done. When you utter words, you should always consider their end. When you establish a practice, you must always consider what it covers. In this, ancient sages were careful about their words and chose their acts. When they spoke they did not just demonstrate the principle of Chan, they used it to open the minds of students who were not yet enlightened. When they established their practices, they did not just take care of themselves; they used them to educate students who were underdeveloped. (Cleary: 1989: 28–29)

This principle of Chan pedagogy may also be applied to writing and, by extension, to what Gao is seeking to do in his work. His acts are his art and his essays are about that art. We learn to read him through his use of Chan practices in his talks and essays. The sages opened their students' minds by letting them experience Chan in the way they were taught; we learn about Gao's art in the way he talks of it. It is necessary for the Chan sage to not only practice his art but to speak of it.

In a letter to Li Shanglao, Zhantang writes:

> For wayfarers of all times, the right strategy for skilfully spreading the Way essentially lies in adapting to communicate. Those who do not know how to adapt stick to the letter and cling to doctrines, get stuck on forms and mired in sentiments—none of them succeed in strategic adaptation . . . So we know that advanced people who know how to get through counter the ordinary to merge with the Way. They do not fail to change responsively by sticking to one thing. (Cleary: 1989: 40–41)

Here is adumbrated Gao's wariness of doctrines and formalism as his way of countering "the ordinary". It also explains, from a Chan perspective, his willingness to shift his focus during his communication with his audience; he does not try to set out in dry formal academic language what he is communicating. Instead, he reverberates his ideas by repeating them in different contexts within the same talk or from one talk to another. His avoidance of "sticking to one thing" may also be part of his interest in different arts.

For Zhantang, the task is to communicate with others in a sincere way by avoiding the pitfalls of those who only want to understand words as abstract things and not as embodied emotions:

> You may get to the bottom of people's words yet fail to get to the bottom of their reason. You may silence their tongues yet fail to conquer their minds. The difficulty of knowing people is what ails sages. This is especially true as monks in recent times who are bright do not strive to communicate with the hearts of other beings. (Cleary: 1989: 42)

This communication is understood in terms of sincerity by Yuanwu in a letter to Government Inspector Wu:

> The study of the Way is in truthfulness, the establishment of truthfulness is in sincerity. Only after you can maintain inner sincerity can you free people from confusion; by maintaining truthfulness in yourself you can teach people to shed delusions . . . So we know that if sincerity is not whole, the mind cannot be safeguarded or trusted. (Cleary: 1989: 53)

Yuanwu's emphasis on sincerity relates to Gao's criticism of those who play word games without any purpose except self-aggrandizement. It also relates to his emphasis on sincerity in the artist and the academic; without inner sincerity, what we say cannot be true, as we are not true to ourselves. Foyan, in "Collection of the Real Herdsman", says: "It is as though you have an eye that sees all forms but does not see itself—this is how your mind is. Its light penetrates everywhere and engulfs everything, so why does it not know itself?" (Cleary: 1989: 171). His advice on how to rectify this blindness is: "Search back into your own vision—think back to the mind that thinks. Who is it?" (Cleary: 1989: 171). What stands in the way of this inner perception is our tendency to rationalize: "As soon as you rationalize, it is hard to understand Zen. You will have to stop rationalizing before you will get it" (Cleary: 1989: 171). For Gao, such rationalizations seem to be common in postmodern art and criticism. Mindlessness, emptiness, nothingness are not negative emotions; they are positive states of being in oneself. There is no set beginning or end. This is advice not to cling to abstract concepts and empty names or terms. Awareness is seen as the flow of consciousness without external restraints by Fozhi in "Instructions to a Layman": "When the flow of consciousness does not dare to cling to objects, this is the power of awareness" (Cleary: 1989: 99).

Other Chan masters stress the ecology of the mind. Mazu explains:

> The Way does not require cultivation—just don't pollute it. What is pollution? As long as you have a fluctuating mind fabricating artificialities and contrivances, all of this is pollution. If you want to understand the Way directly, the normal mind is the Way. What I mean by the normal mind is the mind without artificiality, without subjective judgments, without grasping or rejection. (Cleary: 1989: 133)

Here, pollution of the mind as an environment is understood as the cluttering of our thoughts with ideas that are alien to a "normal mind" which does not seek complicated theories and "clever" difficult concepts invented as part of an academic game.

While these quotes seem to be a random collection of Buddhist precepts that may be alien to the reader, they are intended here to prepare the reader's mind for what will follow in the discussion of Gao's art. In this way, they are offered as a form of meditation that hopefully will prepare the reader to see Gao's intellectual and spiritual background and so feel empathy for his ways of seeing what he gives voice to. At the heart of his perception is a view of the individual which needs to be seen in terms of what is said in *The Diamond Sutra*:

> Because in the minds of enlightened disciples there have ceased to exist such arbitrary concepts of phenomena as an entity, a being, a living being, or a personality. (Gemmell: 1912: 11–12)

These perceptions of reality partly explain Gao's lack of concern with a character's (or, more accurately, a pronoun's) physical descriptions too. The point to bear in mind is that these ideas form a deep spirituality in Gao's approach to literature and communicating about literature. Gao insists on the spiritual aspect of art that has been neglected or negated by more recent mechanistic and abstract theories when they deny any value to art beyond being, in Wimsatt's term, a verbal icon.

By bringing such views into the discussion of literature, Gao makes a significant contribution to our understanding of literature. If there is to be a passing of the current dogmas of postmodernism and poststructuralism, we may need to look away from their source in the West and shift our perceptions to the East where other ideas have existed for centuries which seem, in Gao's eyes, to be compatible with the traditions of art in both the East and the West. It may take an outsider to see this, given the totalizing dominance of poststructuralism in Western universities and art circles.

3

Gao Xingjian's *Aesthetics and Creation* (2012) comprises a series of public addresses and essays composed between 1995 and 2011 in which he discusses his own aesthetics and how this has shaped the creation of his films, paintings, novels, short stories, poems, plays, theatre productions and music. The polymathic range and quality of his art makes Gao's achievement unique. It also makes the writing of a review or essay seeking to do justice to his achievement demanding.

While great art and the artists who make it are timeless, there is still significance in the timing of the publication of this book, coming as it does in Gao's seventy-third year of life. Not that *Aesthetics and Creation* is an apology or a retrospective. There is nothing defensive, tired or exhausted in the writings included in the work. What we have is the affirmation of an artist's way of exploring new avenues for art at a time of life when many artists may have settled into the routine of being a prisoner of their own reputation and achievements.

One way we may change is through our experience of learning. But what is learnt? That depends on the experience one brings to the reading. Without much knowledge of Chinese Buddhism (Chan or Zen), Taoism, Chinese literature, European literature, Peking Opera, dramaturgy, fine arts, music, the history of the Chinese language or experimental film, the reader of *Aesthetics and Creation* may feel out of his or her depth at first. Such a feeling in turn often leads to the impression that the work is difficult. If we succumb to this feeling and give up, we have only failed ourselves by forgetting that any original work that seeks to be sincere and honest will challenge us. Whenever the reader experiences important ideas, he or she is exhilarated and inspired to come away with a different perspective to the one brought to the reading in the first place. This is another way of saying that when we read something worthwhile, original, important, we change as a result of that experience if we can open our eyes or see through what Blake calls "the doors of perception".

Difficulty, like beauty, may be in the eye of the beholder. If we are too lazy to think and too afraid to change our minds, we may only seek that which we already know or are familiar with, as a means of reassuring ourselves that we know the truth already. This search for writers who agree with us can become ostrich-thinking when we stick our heads in the sand and pretend that there is nothing out there to challenge us because we cannot see or hear it. This is tantamount to saying what I don't know can't hurt me. Ignorance may be bliss to a fool, but it can be no excuse for an artist or a student of art. I can only learn something that I

don't already know; if I want to say that I am learning by simply repeating what I already know, then what I am really saying is that I have my dogmas and beliefs already and only seek to find them repeated in other people's words.

If John Dewey is right in *How We Think* (1910), that progress implies change and that learning is the way we develop by changing ourselves, then we must be willing to think about challenging ideas. While these ideas may be new to us, we should also remember that such ideas are not necessarily revolutionary new ideas to others. What makes something seem new is that we ourselves haven't learnt about it yet. Only in this way can one learn to think for oneself and so find the freedom to be and create anything.

But all too often in what William Golding refers to in *The Double Voice* (1996) as "this sad, homogeneous world", we are enticed or coerced by party-political ideologies, consumerist market forces or academic orthodoxy to surrender our independence by conforming to what other people tell us to think. This way, we feel comfortable and safe in expecting that others like us who have likewise unthinkingly surrendered their souls to the systems of others will recognize us and accept us and "our" ideas. The very real tragedy in all this is that we talk ourselves or let others talk us into the illusion that we are doing much thinking at all. In fact, we are being turned into drones or clones of other people who want their readers or students to think like them. Such a state of affairs is not only profoundly unethical: it is the basis of totalitarianism. And all too often it is the basis of education systems that encourage the students only to ask the teacher to tell them what to think and do in order to obtain a pass grade and a piece of paper.

In contrast to this form of slavery, one of the critic's, the writer's, the reviewer's roles should be to raise doubts and to encourage dialogues, debates and arguments. If at the end of this process, agreement is reached, then it has been achieved on a voluntary, free basis. In this process, failure is not only an option; it is to be expected: we learn as much from our mistakes as we do from our successes. To risk such experiences takes courage. It may even seem absurd to those who fear thinking more than they fear death. Why risk criticism, failure and disagreement when, by conforming, I can win the praises of others who see themselves affirmed in "my" opinions. I must be right because "everyone" thinks like me, even though by "everyone" I mean those I read, not those I refuse to read because they think differently. Gao understands the absurdity of failure which is in fact the most important lesson we learn. At the end of *Soul Mountain* (1990/2000), after the anonymous narrator has traveled across China from west to east by following the Yangtze River, he discovers:

> The fact of the matter is I comprehend nothing. I understand nothing. This is how it is. (Gao: 1990/2000)

This is what he knows. But for an impatient reader who wants more, this ending may fail to satisfy. Such a reader needs to remember what has been experienced and learned along the way. This process seems like a river as it is fed with the waters of other rivers and so accumulates experiences, insights and absorbs them into itself. In this way, we form a river-mind.

What the present essay hopes to record is what I have experienced and learned as I read *Aesthetics and Creation* by following or immersing myself in the flow of Gao's thoughts. As such, it is a record of a journey in the mind of what I call a great soul.

4

In the first chapter, "The Position of the Writer", Gao sees that for the past hundred years, the writer has been caught between two evils: political ideologies and the market. Neither of these positions is conducive to art: "How the writer today can transcend political advantage, transcend the market, remain unwaveringly independent, and be able to speak out in his or her own voice is precisely the issue I would like to address" (Gao: 2012: 4). He shows us how to do this by doing it, as Baiyun has advised the Chan student discussed above (Cleary: 1989: 28–29).

These market and political forces threaten to drown out the writer's voice; they are two sides of the one totalitarian coin. Without a voice, communication, in the physical sense, is impossible. This focus on the voice is central to Gao's aesthetics. What the writer needs to find is his or her own voice which, though frail and isolated, is the only viable option if clichéd language is to be avoided. The search for authentic voices guides his travels in *Soul Mountain*:

> Where are people's authentic voices to be found? Literature. It is only literature that can speak about the truth of human existence that politics is incapable of addressing or reluctant to speak about. (Gao: 2012: 7)

In writers such as Balzac and Dostoevsky, Gao finds: "truthful portrayals of humanity and society, revealing entirely both the dilemmas of human existence and the complexities of human nature" (Gao: 2012: 7). To create these portrayals, the artist needs to listen to his own

voice as it is the "primary impulse for writing and it springs from perceptions that originate from a person's real feelings and experiences" (Gao: 2012: 8). The voice is what affirms the individual's own existence and the writer is a witness to this voice by providing testimonies to its existence (Gao: 2012: 8). For this voice to be sounded, it needs to be sincere, as Zhantang and Yuanwu stress, as discussed above in Section 2 of this essay (Cleary: 1989: 42, 53). We cannot perceive an insincere voice; such a term is an oxymoron.

The voices heard in *Soul Mountain* are reverberated in Gao's voice in *Aesthetics and Creation*. It is at once strident, confident and powerful. This need not be seen as a contradiction between strength and frailty:

> The solitary individual who becomes aware of his or her own existence will want to speak out in his or her frail voice despite being situated within the problems of society, and this requires strength. This strength primarily stems from the self-belief of writers, and they must believe in the existence of this kind of literature, otherwise it would be impossible to persevere with this kind of writing. (Gao: 2012: 10)

What gives him the courage to go on is his belief in the necessity for literature as a record of this individual creative spirit. To speak out of the loneliness that comes with such aesthetics, the individual needs "cold eyes in order to dispassionately observe the living phenomena of the boundless universe" (Gao: 2012: 10). To prepare for this observation, Gao in part relies on Taoist and Chan (Zen) Buddhist forms of introspection and detachment. Later in the book, Gao recycles and expands on this idea:

> The rationality in art must mature into a calm and detached vision that will light up burgeoning perceptions hidden in the darkness and disentangle emotions aroused by the creative impulse; only then does it start to solidify and only then is beauty manifested in images. (Gao: 2012: 117)

This vision may relate to Gao's interest in *The Diamond Sutra* (Lee: 2012: xix) where Buddhist ideas of how we perceive things are presented. Gao devotes a whole section (Gao: 2012: 124–129) to a meditation entitled "Time, Space, and Chan Buddhism" in which he addresses himself in the second person as "you". This use of the second person may in part come from *The Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* where the Buddha in dialogue with his students often leads to the student Subhuti answering the questions that the Buddha sometimes asks as well as his own questions. By using the second person, Gao is talking as

much to the reader as to himself; he is bringing the reader into his mind and putting his own mind into the mind of the reader. In this, he may be reading himself and encouraging the reader to do the same. He is also detaching himself from the ego and the self in a Buddhist perspective. Much of what Gao says here of visual art may also be true of literature. The writer in his loneliness reaches out for the voices in his mind just as the narrator or narrators in *Soul Mountain* speak to themselves as they search out others as dialogue partners. In delving into one's inner mind or soul, one realizes or perceives one's own consciousness. This consciousness is what literature is: it represents the writer's or characters' understanding of the human world.

What distinguishes literature from philosophy for Gao is that artists translate or convert their thoughts into their characters' thoughts and experiences in specific situations and times (Gao: 2012: 14). By honestly or truthfully achieving this most difficult form of expression, the writer records what real people did and thought. When we read the great works of the past or the present, we see that humanity has not changed; we see the same things in new spaces and times and so reaffirm our belief that there are truths the sincere artist is witness to.

The writer's "testimony passes through a light filter as he writes with an eye for what is aesthetically beautiful" and so "relies on aesthetic judgments alone" (Gao: 2012: 15). This visualized tradition of literature leads Gao to observe: "Literature is like a long river with an endless source, and writers are solitary travelers" (Gao: 2012: 16). He perceives this by infusing his personal experiences into his work. This is the source of what makes a valuable writer's work individual and unique (Gao: 2012: 17). Because such experiences are real, later readers can communicate with what the writer has to say. They know they have a dialogue partner because they can hear the writer's voice. The reader shares and includes his or her own experiences to produce associations and reflections. In this way, experience as a "sympathetic reaction is aroused" in the reader (Gao: 2012: 19).

This uniqueness of each one of us seems to be the heart of his aesthetics:

> Poets and writers of different times bring different experiences and use different means to deepen and enrich one's understanding of humanity . . . These experiences, derived from the individual, are written in different languages, but transcending national boundaries and time they have become humankind's shared spiritual wealth. This is owing to the interconnectedness of human nature, and as long as people have had some rudimentary education, they will have the propensity for mutual

> communication, feelings and understanding. The writer transposes his aesthetic experiences into his works, and a sympathetic reaction is aroused when the reader of later times encounters these works. Further supplemented by the reader's own experiences, association and reflection are produced. It is in this way that the works left behind by a solitary individual have been transmitted to successive later eras, transcending national boundaries, transcending national cultures, and transcending languages. This is the enduring achievement of the writer. (Gao: 2012: 18)

By looking into our own hearts and telling the truth about what we find there, we will be communicating what is human in us and so others who read us will share our feelings and ideas when they too read us with honesty and sincerity. Gao's message is that we are our own masters:

> When the writer recognizes the predicament of the individual in society as well as his own limitations, makes choices according to his capabilities, and remains resolutely independent, he will not find it hard to win an abundance of freedom in the realm of literary creation that he controls. The writer emerging from the miasma of twentieth-century ideology no longer needs to attach himself to politics because literature is an affirmation of humanity's awareness of his own existence and basically transcends practical benefits. And this has always been so. (Gao: 2012: 19)

However, ideologies seek to imprison us in others' political, commercial or theoretical views. By resisting them, we assert our freedom. It is no accident that Gao reminds us that the creative writer controls his "literary creation", not the critic who seeks to impose his abstract meaning on the work of art in conformity with prevailing "empty theory" (Gao: 2012: 158). In contrast to such artificial complexity, Gao's argument, in his own words about his paintings, is an "extremely simple, quite unfashionable, but highly matter-of-fact statement" (Gao: 2012: 158).

From this opening chapter, Gao makes clear that the artist "documents experience" to create "a testimony left on the existential situation of human beings" the understanding of which "may be called consciousness" (Gao: 2012: 13). As a document and as testimony, literature's "most fundamental criterion" is to understand the "truth of human life" and to strive "to approximate truth" (Gao: 2012: 14). The writer testifies to his times about what he sees and hears through his consciousness. He creates this consciousness in his writing. Such "testimony passes through a light filter as the artist writes with an eye for what is

aesthetically beautiful", as literature "relies on aesthetic judgments alone" stimulated by emotional responses in the artist that are shared by the reader or viewer (Gao: 2012: 16).

In the remaining ten chapters of his book, Gao develops these themes in terms of how he practices his art in its different embodiments. For some readers and critics, the way he proceeds to do this may seem puzzling: Why does he feel the need to explain his aesthetics and how he realizes it in his creations? The simple answer is that most of the chapters were originally commissioned by organizations or conference committees. It would be a particularly arrogant artist who refused to explain his art upon request. It would also go against the grain of Gao's argument that the artist is a communicator, and against Chan ideas of the teacher.

A more immediate reason for Gao's responses to requests for talks is hinted at in his frequent dismissals of postmodernism in the book. He is aware that the dominant literary ideology of postmodernism would seek to subsume his work in its own theory of art and language. By explicitly rejecting this ideology, he makes it nearly impossible for a postmodernist to take over the role of explaining his art. Almost. Although he does not mention them by name, he would be aware that postmodernists have already begun to take over the ways Chinese write and think about novels. One example is Jessica Yeung (2008) who writes to encapsulate Gao in this trap: Derrida's ultimate separation of logos and meaning formulated in the idea of *différance*, has become the central theory of poststructuralist linguistics, and the heart and soul of postmodernist writing. In spite of this problem of language, it remains the main means of communication between human beings, leading inexorably to the isolation of the individual.

There are a number of remarks in *Soul Mountain* directly echoing these philosophies that large parts of human experience are not translatable into language . . . Sometimes these stories explode into surrealist images, sometimes they take the form of unpunctuated utterances. They often frustrate the attempt for subjective reality to be logically communicated to another person. Linguistic communication that depends on a fixed grammatical and lexical system is taken as an inadequate means to convey subjective reality, which is not defined by language. This is why "You" and "She" have tried to communicate through telling each other stories, which is actually a means of expressing feelings and emotions, they still fail to reach each other and finally end up parting on bad terms. In fact, this question of language's (in)capability to convey reality is an issue so frequently brought up in the narrative that it dominates the meta-narrative, the third level of reality in the novel.

It is a level on which the text is aware of itself, a reality beyond both the external and psychological realities of the narrative (Yeung: 2008: 89).

Here, instead of focusing on the novel as a work of art that speaks the truth about human existence (Gao: 2012: 7), the critic has taken it upon herself to speak for the writer and his text. She is trying to give things names and fit these things into forms; in this, she would not see the Buddha's warnings against such a procedure in *The Diamond Sutra* as well as his warning against the use of "concepts". One feels, as is often the case with this type of criticism, that the theory is a surrogate aesthetics: a theory and its application are deemed to be beautiful (or at least, pleasing) in place of the text that they distort. There are no quotes offered as evidence; evidence is superfluous when one has Derrida's theory as testimony to the truth of what one asserts. Nor does there seem to be any awareness of what Gao has said outside his novel regarding postmodernism, which is understandable given the postmodern theory that the author is dead and has no right to speak for his art. In place of argument and evidence from a close reading of the novel, there are only assertions of theory. Instead of reading the novel as a communicative act, the theorist has already made her mind up about the structures she will find there. This is anti-intellectual and poor methodology. Ignorance of Gao's writings both in the novel and elsewhere should be grounds for dismissing Yeung's reading in any literary critical school except the hyperreal one that accepts Derrida's ideas uncritically, as the prevailing dogma, especially in the italicized sentences that seems to cling to Derrida's outmoded insistence on the idea of *langue* as the structure of language, even when used by real people in real life.

Yeung's misreading of *Soul Mountain*, while perhaps predicted in poststructural theories of reader-response, serves to contextualize the importance of Gao's uncompromising rejection of postmodern theory. If an artist is to remain free to write, then that artist cannot place his or her art in such anti-artistic frames that fail to recognize the processes of perception of reality and the representation of those aesthetic perceptions by the individual artist who is concerned with the individual's experience.

To ward off the postmodernists' attempts to subsume his work in their theory, Gao makes a series of bold, even aggressive, statements such as:

> Some later-generation *nouveau roman* writers went further and turned fiction into intellectual discussions, and by overturning story, plot, and characters and deconstructing the narrator and narrative language, they turned fictional creation into an intellectual game. Fiction was thus transformed into a text about concepts . . . That

> fiction had been reduced to this, of course, was related to the ideology behind so-called modernity. The introduction of social revolution and historical evolutionary theory, with its continuing revolution and its perpetual overturning into the domain of literature and the arts, led not to creation but instead to the withering and annihilation of art and literature. Once fiction turned into an intellectual game that could be written in any manner, it lost its social and human consciousness and could not leave behind anything worth a second reading. Instead, there was only a widespread proliferation of vacuous deconstructionist literary theories everywhere. (Gao: 2012: 23)

Responses such as this are in nearly every chapter of the book. In a wider sense, these statements fit what Gao is saying about the distinction between philosophy and literature: the philosopher constructs his own system while the artist "confronts the vibrant human world and strives to confer upon it an aesthetic expression" (Gao: 2012: 194).

Later in the same chapter, titled "Environment and Literature", Gao repeats the idea of confrontation when he describes what literature does: Literature confronts human beings, individual concrete living human beings, and even when they are fabricated they are derived from the writer's personal experiences and perceptions (Gao: 2012: 196).

The artist learns about literature from literature. He reminds us that literature "has objectives and methods that are informed by literature" (Gao: 2012: 197). He then offers an overview of the history of literature and concludes that literature is a spiritual search, which in Buddhist terms is an attempt to find the Way:

> Looking back like this at the history of literature, one can see that all these are divorced from practical interest and are humankind's spiritual search, a need of the inner mind. (Gao: 2012: 197)

> This need is paramount, given the predicament we are all in: Individuals are increasingly powerless in their life environment. In addition, in confronting the day-to-day worsening of the ecological environment, the raucous cacophony of politics, the all-pervasiveness of the media and the all-intrusiveness of the market and advertising, this pitiful, powerless, and helpless individual is indeed insignificant. So how can the real voice of this insignificant individual be heard? (Gao: 2012: 198)

Again, the individual, like the artist, is seen in confrontation with things. This confrontation is understood in terms of the absurd chaos of existence: "The total chaos of the self has not

only created disasters for others but has often led to the destruction of the self" (Gao: 2012: 199). Literature is where these chaotic forces can be resisted in order to create a voice that confronts its environment by communicating with others:

> It is literature, and literature alone, that can give a voice to such an individual and his true perceptions . . . Literature is neither replaced by political authority nor eroded by time, so it can be read and reread, and humankind's experiences and the understanding gained from these can be transmitted over generations. (Gao: 2012: 198)

This is why we continue to read the works of the past and those contemporary works that confront our situation:

> Humanity turns to literature because it is only through aesthetics that one can relieve and transcend this anxiety and by so doing affirm one's existence . . . The person affirmed in literature is made into another person or persons. With the help of aesthetics, the writer transforms his experiences and perceptions into different characters, and by doing this he sublimates his inner anxieties. (Gao: 2012: 199)

He reminds us that while Sartre saw others as hell, "the self in the eyes of others likewise is hell" (Gao: 2012: 199). This is the chaos we are all in. Out of this chaos comes creativity:

> However, the magic of literature lies in the making of another person during the creative process. This helps the writer become detached, allowing him to observe with an eye transcending himself, a third eye, an intelligent eye, that will inform his writing. Therefore, the creative process of writing literature helps the writer purify his inner mind. (Gao: 2012: 200)

> Without this ecology of the mind, we cannot create beauty or ourselves in the characters we embody; until we clear our perception, we cannot see things as they really are. In confronting the issues raised in life, the writer will also come into conflict with the state in which he has his cultural roots. This gives the writer three options: remaining silent, conforming, or fleeing. (Gao: 2012: 201)

It is in this context, that Gao's problems with postmodernism fit:

> These literary views and theories that contained only arguments turned literature into conceptual games and resulted in a variety of game rules but apparently not any worthwhile works. This sort of historicism is also an ideological product and has nothing to do with literature. The creation of the writer is always of this instant, confronting the works of predecessors as references and invariably referring to them. There is no literature without foundations. The writer confronts works of the past, and whether he likes or rejects them, they construct a series of coordinates for establishing his own path. (Gao: 2012: 203)

It is important to understand the traditions of literature because it is only in working within them that a writer can keep contact with what I have elsewhere referred to as the underground streams (Conlon: 2003). Gao puts it this way:

> The testimonies left by literature can never be passé. If the writer exhausts heart and mind and does leave behind a penetrating portrayal of life at a particular time and place, the work will be enduring. Literary works are more truthful than the histories written by authorities. Those grand official histories are rewritten time and again along with changes in political power, and just as in some game, masks are perpetually changed to legitimize power. However, once a literary work is published, it is not altered because this is the great pact between the writer and history. Humankind is thus provided with a history of the soul that is more truthful. (Gao: 2012: 203)

This sounds very close to T.S. Eliot's view of tradition's value:

> The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious not of what is dead, but of what is already living. (Eliot: 1932: 22)

Such views on the value of tradition are discarded by the poststructuralists who see traditions as things to be overturned to make way for new, disconnected and hyperreal theories. For Gao, literature that remains true to the perception and representation of the human spirit will survive the test of time and so will communicate with others in future just as the writer of that literature has communicated with real people in his own time and with real writers who

focused on the human spirit in the past. From such a viewpoint, it seems understandable that Gao is hostile to the dominant forces of postmodernism and poststructuralism that he senses are anti-humanistic. The constant retheorizing of these schools has only led, in Gao's view, to revolutions in literary theory for their own sakes, not to a serious confrontation in terms of seeing what is what in the individual's life as it really is experienced. Abstract thinking is the path to hyperreality where we can pretend that we have all the answers; but, in fact, we are only perpetuating the hell we are actually in, not confronting it.

This may sound bleak, but it need not be so. Gao sees that there are cycles in history and art. He ends his talk with a vision of a new renaissance which has much in common with a Buddhist view of cyclical or reincarnate time:

> This is a world shrouded in the dark shadows of the last day. The economic crisis and the decline of the West show no signs of slowing down, and the so-called newly rising nations simply follow the old circular road of capital accumulation already traveled by the West. When the next cycle of renaissance in literature and the arts will come about, no one can say, but I believe that it is literature, and literature alone that can provide inspiration. (Gao: 2012: 205)

By remaining in contact with the traditions that postmodernism seeks to continuously overthrow, the writer is maintaining the literary environment in a way to preserve the hope of rebirth. We cannot learn from a past that we deny or are blind and deaf to. This is the significance of art as a communication network from the past to the future. It can only work when artists tell the truth about individual human beings in their creations. And this can only happen if artists have the ability to perceive these truths and represent their perceptions in works that are communicative in intent, not divorced from the possibility of contact with the actual perceptions and communications a writer experiences.

However, while we avoid such confrontations with reality, as we are abstracted in postmodern theories that are not really aesthetics, we cannot break free from the hyperreality we have constructed around ourselves. In the words of *The Dhammapada*:

> What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind. If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the beast that draws the cart. (Mascaró: 1971: 1)

In Buddhist terms, this spiritual pollution is dross over our eyes blinding us to the power of our minds which are shaped by our past. The suffering we experience anesthetizes our minds into surrendering to the forces of ideology that keep us ignorant of our past by telling us it is all a game and of no consequence when we cannot see the truth because there is no truth except the apparently beautiful logic of our theory. Instead of confronting the actual language of a work, we only have to apply our theory like a meaning-making machine and, presto, out come the meaningless meanings our theory predicted: we see only what we want to see. This is a form of paranoia.

When criticism denies the voice of the writer as a dialogue partner, it is also denying the voices of others who live in that voice. These voices are not only the traditions he draws on, but also the dialogues he creates in his art. Such criticism is necessarily complicit in the silencing of the one thing that gives us hope against the forces that threaten to crush us, whether they are of the state, the market or the academy. While the writer's art focuses on the perception and representation of the individual, the critic's role in the communication network that keeps the art alive is to hone his or her skills in perceiving the artist's actual work in its individuality and then representing that work through the prism of his or her own consciousness. But when art and criticism are sick with the postmodern malaise of hyperreality, and when the only voice we recognize is our own as we project our reading onto a writer we have defined as voiceless, then we are in no position to do these things.

5

Is Gao a voice in the wilderness whose warnings fall on deaf ears? Being a prophet in one's own country is always a thankless if not dangerous thing to be. If we in the academies have lost our true voices as communicators with writers (as we have subscribed to the death of the author dogma), we can regain our voices by attending to the ways Gao represents his own perceptions and art in *Aesthetics and Creation*. In this work, Gao reminds us of what we seem to have forgotten: how to think and talk about art in ways that maintain its ecological significance in this absurd world we have made worse by our self-imposed abstract thinking.

I have discussed elsewhere (Conlon: 2007) how Camus sees the absurdity of thinking in absurd ways about our actual absurd condition: that way is truly suicidal. In a passage that seems very close to Gao's position, Camus writes in the first person about the need for freedom in an absurd world:

> I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. I don't know that this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me—that is what I understand . . . If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should be this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me in opposition to all creation . . . And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it? If therefore I want to preserve it, I can through a constant awareness, ever revived, ever alert. (Camus: 1955: 5152)

In contrast to abstract theories that leave us in a hyperreal condition. we must think clearly about absurdity. By a close reading of Gao's work, we may relearn what we have been taught to forget in postmodernism and poststructuralism. If we can learn, we have hope. Instead of clumsily trying to read Gao as a follower of Camus, we need to recognize that Gao arrives at similar responses to the world through his understanding of Chan Buddhism; there is more than one path to enlightenment and when we put them in dialogue with each other, we may gain fresh insights into our real condition.

Here, Gao is one of the new teachers who has managed to create outside the confines of conventional contemporary theory. In his work, there are adumbrations of the new cycle of renaissance, coming not from the West but from a Chinese writer living in exile in the West who has found himself a literary exile in his new country, France: the home of poststructuralism.

One way Gao is not a voice in the wilderness is through the quality and variety of his achievements in a wide range of the arts. We hear his voice in his plays, novels, paintings, films, and in his public talks and essays. He has a very real presence in the world of art. These achievements will survive the test of time, long after postmodernism has disappeared as yet another movement and become a footnote in literary history, much as Stalinist socialist realism has become a footnote.

6

If all an artist has in order to resist the totalizing chaos of this world are his aesthetic perceptions and his voice which enables him to represent his world, then expression of these ideas must be communicated to others in ways that protect the artist's environment: his artistic creations.

In *Soul Mountain*, Gao seems to demonstrate the Way (Tao) to read and think about any of his works. He does this through the example of the Way followed by the anonymous narrator who is presented through the use of the first, second and third person voices: sometimes the narrative is told in the first person and at others it is in the second or third person. The novel moves like a river as the narrator travels across China: from the mountains in Sichuan, it flows east along the Yangtze River to the sea as the narrator searches for the real China and finds spiritual enlightenment. He moves by acting as a kind of ethnographer, recording the ways of real people before they disappear. Going with the flow of the narrative, the reader, in a sense, surrenders to the work of art and thus immerses him or herself in it. There also seems to be a deliberate inversion of the direction of movement in *Journey to the West*, which likewise deals with Buddhist and Taoist searches for enlightenment. By returning to classic Chinese literature, Gao suggests that the Ways of art are there to be seen and experienced, if we can learn to open our minds to them.

As all of Gao's works connect with each other in an artistic ecosystem, we can expect to hear and see things in one work that we have already experienced in other works. While this repetition may seem off-putting to a particularly impatient Western reader, it seems to be a pattern in Buddhist as well as Taoist literature. It can be found in *The Dream of Red Mansions*, a novel cited by Gao as one of his influences. Various versions of the novel's writing are retold from different Buddhist and Taoist perspectives. It is also present in the novels of Mo Yan where stories from one work are retold in other works. In Thai literature, the work of Pira Sudham also unfolds in this shape of recycling where stories and whole novels are absorbed in *Shadowed Country* (2005), the story of the reincarnation of the hero Prem Surin. (See Conlon: 2011 for a discussion of how the repetition of previously published stories and whole novels creates a feedback effect that helps to shape and maintain the ecology of the work of art.) Such recycling or rebirth may create an internal tradition within a writer's oeuvre as the karma or logic of the flow of experience.

One fundamental belief about writing that comes out of the idea of rebirth is that words, like people, do not die once they are written. In *Soul Mountain*, the narrator seeks to

save the traditional ways of China by recording them in his writings too. In one sense, he is retelling the stories told to him by those he meets along the way. By retelling them in writing, Gao is preserving them. He is also using them as inspiration for his art which seeks to embody the voices of the China he experiences. His achievement in the novel is to represent the ways enlightenment comes out of the chaotically experienced encounters he has had. The flow of experience that is not explained or contextualized through external narrative interference may be seen in the segue between chapters in *Soul Mountain*. One example taken at random is the bridge between Chapters 19 and 20:

> **19** [Last lines of chapter]
> Tell me a story,
> When the great flood broke out, only a small boat was left in the world, a brother and his younger sister were in the boat, they couldn't bear the loneliness and huddled close together, only the flesh of the other was real, could verify one's own existence,
> You love me,
> The girl was seduced by the snake,
> The snake is my big brother.
>
> **20** [First lines of chapter]
> I am taken by an Yi singer to several of the Yi camps in the mountain range behind Caobai. (Gao: 1990 / 2000: 116–117)

The marked absence of conventional punctuation (there are no quotation marks or full stops indicating a clear ending to each utterance in the passage from Chapter 19) creates a sense of the narrative's flow in the mind of the narrator until the various voices seem to blend in his inner speech. The result is a kaleidoscopic sense of perception (see Conlon: 2012 for a discussion of this metaphor) which sees and represents many aspects of reality simultaneously. There is no preparation in Chapter 19 for the upcoming trip to the Yi camps; it just occurs, as in a flow or in flux. These apparently sudden shifts in point of view are reminiscent of the ways Chan Buddhists narrated their teachings; they discourage us from clinging to a sequence of events by agglomerating them into what Camus sees as "this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion" which is a denial of the chaos he suggests we must confront (Camus: 1955: 51). They are intended to stimulate the listener or reader to make the connections for him or herself and so gain some insight by recreating the intended meaning in his or her own mind. In the language of the Tipitaka,

dharma is the encapsulation of enlightenment that can only be gained by being directly perceived (sandithika) as a personal experience (ehipassika) to be understood in each one's own way (paccattani veditabo vinnuhi). Suzuki (1961: 61) explains, "This meant that the Dharma was to be intuited and not to be analytically reached by concepts."

From my own personal reading experience of *Aesthetics and Creation* some themes emerge which I will now follow as they recur throughout the text. These themes are not separable, at least in my mind; they are entangled like so many voices that, taken together, create a polyphonic effect that emerges from a close reading as the mind of the reader organizes itself in response to the mind of the writer. In doing this, I am trying to find the voice of narrative language in my own terms, as my own ehipassaka, based on an intuitional understanding produced through a meditation on the text as I read it following the order in which it is presented. However, I am not claiming that I have experienced satori in regards to Gao or anything else for that matter.

7

In Chapter 2, "The Art of Fiction" (Gao: 2012), Gao specifies his own approach to rendering the stream of consciousness:

> The articulation of dream, hallucination, and the dim impulses of the inner mind, or even of ephemeral feelings and images must all be contained in sequential sentences. (Gao: 2012: 30)

He calls the resulting writing "a flow of language" (Gao: 2012: 30). This flow may be perceived in Buddhist terms of letting go of things, not clinging to them, when one enters the stream and moves towards enlightenment. (See a discussion of this in section 2 above.) Such a flow cannot be captured through conventional patterns of language; it requires:

> . . . returning to the source of language—that is, when constructing a sentence, one must listen intently to the language of the inner mind, even if it is not spoken aloud, because the sound of the language is linked to the words and sentences, and is the starting point of language. The basic substance of language is sound. (Gao: 2012: 31)

This is why Chan Buddhist approaches to perceiving and understanding the sound of the inner mind are so vital in his work: if the written language is "severed" from the sound, "the language will perish" (Gao: 2012: 31). He sees that it is "the spoken language of everyday

life that is the basis of fiction creation" (Gao: 2012: 31). As Mabel Lee observes in her introduction to Gao's book, this means that Gao turned away from all the Western influenced grammatical reforms to written Chinese language that have occurred since the 1920s in order to standardize it (Lee: 2012: xx). The "living language" used for thinking and speaking does not have these restrictions.

By hearing this language, one can make the mood of the thinking audible and the language changes with each change in the flow of the mood. What may sound ungrammatical to a reader not used to the living language in fiction or to the ways of Chan Buddhism, is actually the flow of language in the inner mind. By hearing and feeling this flow, we can perceive through aural means what is "uttered" by the inner mind and so enter "deep consciousness" (Gao: 2012: 32). He refers to this language in terms of its "musical feel" (Gao: 2012: 31). Such music comes from changes in the tones of spoken language as well as from its mood and rhythm that are "linked to specific psychological feelings" (Gao: 2012: 31). The living language is the recording of these changes in mood and rhythm that come with changes in emotions (Gao: 2012: 32). To achieve this, Gao suggests a technique that seems clearly linked to Buddhist meditation and to the perception of reality as in a constant state of flux:

> In searching for this sort of language, it is important first to concentrate and then to listen intently. This does not mean only describing the character's lovely face and smiling countenance but also requires focusing one's gaze inwards and listening intently to what is uttered by the inner mind. (Gao: 2012: 32)

He links this search to the author's attitudes towards his narrators and characters: how can we listen when our attitude towards a character is interfering with the communication? This attitude comes from the author's sentiments manifested in aesthetic responses such as seeing the characters as tragic or comic, beautiful or ugly, and so on. To maintain a clear attitude, the author must "keep the necessary distance from the character" (Gao: 2012: 31) by listening and observing intently. Again, the approach is Buddhist:

> In other words, the author must purify himself and extricate himself from the total chaos of the self to allow for lucid thinking. And by using a pair of wise eyes, or what might be called a pair of neutral eyes, he will be able to concentrate and listen as he immerses himself in the character's inner mind and grasps the right tone of language to manifest the feelings of the character. To listen or to look are mere actions that

> have no other implications, but in highly concentrated observation and intense listening, the attention of the observer endows the object with meaning. This form of observation brings with it aesthetic judgments. (Gao: 2012: 32)

Meaning is given to this chaos through intense observation, a form of meditation, which in turn allows for aesthetic judgments and the development of a spiritual, poetic sense. Expanding on these points, Gao suggests that to relate "the boundless chaos and subconscious of the dream world", the writer uses the "process of telling so it is best to resort to speech when dealing with the inner mind, which eludes description" (Gao: 2012: 35). This process is the flow of language he has already described; but now he adds that this flow can be produced because our concentration and focus are constantly shifting or in flux. However, he differentiates between telling and narrating:

> The fiction writer must separate the telling of events and the narrating of the character's memories: these are different levels. The latter will have retreated to the psychological level and is in fact a recreation of past circumstances that are coloured by sentiment. Especially when memories are derived from the narrator's perspective, the thoughts produced by both memory and wish are often chaotically interwoven. (Gao: 2012: 35)

What shapes the language of art as "purposeful behaviour" (Gao: 2012: 35) is the making of these shifts and decisions about our perceptions and how these render the psychology of characters. When we understand narration in these terms, we can see that it actualizes art or embodies it in its deliberate actions.

He returns to ideas he has already discussed in this chapter or talk when he reveals more about how aesthetics and perception are linked in art when the author makes judgments about a character's tragic or comic aspects of experience:

> When focusing and listening to the characters, the author will give such aesthetic judgments, and moreover, these will be realized in the narrative language of the fiction. Hence fiction is also a unity of perception and aesthetics. (Gao: 2012: 38)

After re-contextualizing his argument, he expands it by linking it to *Soul Mountain*, Chan Buddhism and the varieties of language we use consciously or subconsciously:

> The aesthetics of fiction can also gain entry to the spiritual realm via the perceptual level. The realms attained in poetry can likewise be attained in fiction. The frog appearing in the snow in *Soul Mountain* constructs an image, and this sort of enlightenment is similar to a Chan Buddhist realm. Perception can transform into enlightenment, thought can be sublimated into the spiritual and conscious observation and contemplation of existence do not lead only to religion but can also lead to aesthetics. By becoming fully immersed in discovering the functions of language from the subconscious and the preconscious to the conscious, from the mental to the spiritual, from nonlanguage information to supralanguage spiritual enlightenment, it seems that the writer will find the language for expression. It is in this respect that the linguistic art of fiction is far from exhausted, and it is in this that its magic lies. (Gao: 2012: 38–39)

In making these observations based on his perceptions, the writer gains and provides to the reader aesthetic pleasure and spiritual release (Gao: 2012: 39). The spiritual and the aesthetic together may lead to enlightenment. The image of immersion also evokes the Buddhist idea of entering the stream that leads to enlightenment. Each of these experiences is unique and transcends any superficial commonality or identity through race, ethnicity or culture. In this way, each work of art is unique (Gao: 2012: 39).

By writing this chapter in a circular way in which ideas are re-circulated and restated in different contexts of his argument, Gao is inviting his reader or audience to immerse themselves in the flow of his thoughts. What may seem chaos at first is resolved by the reader going with the flow of his narrative in a way that accepts the flow of language as more than the stream-of-consciousness. For Gao, the language of the novel forms the overall narrative flow that has a particular Buddhist implication of the Way to enlightenment. Everything is absorbed in an aesthetic experience that cannot be pulled apart or articulated in scientific or overly rationalistic terms. There is no linear beginning or ending to the processes or Way that Gao is interested in following.

To have explained his art in other, more commonly acceptable, linguistic or critical terms would have been to fit his view of art as a unique spiritual and aesthetic experience into words that by their history are suggesting a more ordered, homogenous view of language and art. To have done so would have been to undercut his argument: we cannot explain our rejection of an ideology by using the terms and methods of that ideology to explain our life outside that ideology. In Blake's words, we would remain enslaved in another's system.

In Chapter 3, Gao discusses one of his plays, *Wild Man* (1985). The matter of this play, the wild man and an ecologist's random thoughts as he searches for him, anticipates the narrator's search for the wild man in *Soul Mountain*, as an ethnographic researcher looking for a free person in the wild who has not been socialized in the China of the researcher's day. Gao sees the stage as "a specifically constructed environment" that does not have "to present portrayals of real life" (Gao: 2012: 45). He is critical of realism in the theatre as audience goers come to see performance, not life as they already know it. He sees performance theatre in Italian impromptu comedy and in "Asia's traditional opera" (Gao: 2012: 45) where actors don't conceal that they are actors performing publicly recognized acts. He calls for "theatre creation" to include "the performance methods of song, dance, masks, face make-up, magic, and acrobatics" (Gao: 2012: 45). This performance approach creates an atmosphere where the ecologist's random thoughts flow throughout the performance. He sees in this open flow a way of making the play into a musical work performed or created on a stage understood as a "hypothetical environment" (Gao: 2012: 46). It requires only that there be a connecting thread in the play:

> In *Wild Man* it is the ecologist's random thoughts and musings that thread through the entire play. This flow of consciousness has enormous freedom, and intersected by a complexity of polyphonic constructions, the play is somewhat like a symphony. Finding it impossible to divide the work into the scene sequences of conventional plays, I decided to write it up as three musical movements. (Gao: 2012: 46)

To create this musicality, the actor needs to purify or cleanse his "usual voice" (Gao: 2012: 48), the voice of the real world. This cleansing also results in the voices used in Peking Opera. He then needs to enter "the mind of a neutral actor" through this voice; there is no "I" in his performance, but a "he" or third person mask. This allows him to speak to the character he is performing as "you":

> At this time, the consciousness of self has transformed into a third-eye that observes and modulates the performance of the actor, who has become you and has thus gained an abundance of freedom on the stage. (Gao: 2012: 49)

In transforming himself, the actor becomes like a storyteller who can enter the character or step back from it at any time. In this sense, the actor is following the same process Gao has described in terms of the narrator and the writer in the previous chapter. There is a process of

detachment and purification required of both actor and writer. The Chan Buddhist aspects of this distancing from oneself in order to detach and purify the mind have been discussed in Section 2 of this essay. But another factor is introduced: the deliberate exposure of the role being played by the actor:

> When the person acting does not conceal his actor status, he will be publicly acting his role. At that particular time the actor has an attitude towards the role he is acting that determines the strategies he uses for his presentation, and these presentation strategies also constitute performance. To begin with, the actor must have ample psychological space, and the play must provide for this performance space. This allows the actor to adopt a certain attitude towards the character, mocking or sympathizing with him . . . (Gao: 2012: 50)

In such a space, the actor can solicit responses from the audience in terms of feedback. By achieving such a relationship, the actor is communicating in two ways at the same time:

> he is communicating with the character he is performing and with the audience he is performing for. This can only be achieved if he empties himself by transforming into a "neutral actor". (Gao: 2012: 50)

Here, as in *Soul Mountain*, Gao uses the switch in pronouns to create this space in the actor and on the stage:

> He defends this use of pronouns to replace "named" characters against any poststructuralist attempt to decode them as mere signs: To replace characters with pronouns does not mean that the characters in a play are thus simplified by becoming a certain personal pronoun you, I, he. This you, I, and he are not mere signs; instead, they are cut into the experience of the character from different angles to reflect different facets of the character's inner mind like a prism, each facet comparing itself with and referring to the others; so by changing the pronoun, a person's complex inner world, which is normally hard to present, is transformed into clear and powerful stage images. (Gao: 2012: 53–54)

These images are transformations of the inner world of the mind, not just empty linguistic signs. In a passage that reverberates from the previous chapter, Gao links his approach to the novel to his approach to the theatre:

> The tripartite nature of performance—from self to neutral-actor status to character—coalesces as three pronouns because these pronouns are constructed on three levels of human consciousness. Consciousness is formed through articulation in language, and these three levels reflect deep structures of the consciousness. It is only with these three levels that the human consciousness becomes discerning, and as these three levels serve as coordinates for one another, discernment becomes lucid. Otherwise, the state of the inner mind is merely a totality of chaos, and there is no possibility of discernment or narration, and a person will be oblivious of having a self. (Gao: 2012: 55)

In this way, the playwright can "present the inner mind experiences of a character" (55)—the domain of the artist and Chan Buddhism. To overcome the chaos of the mind, the three perspectives of "you", "I" and "he" are used to shape a communicative relationship: as "you" the character is narrated; as "I" he is telling his own story; and as "he" he is being narrated. The shifts between these three levels of consciousness create a sense of space and freedom in which lucidity is made possible through the dialogues of the mind. By moving between these three voices, a sense of inner space is created as the expansive "realm" of the mind. As in meditation, there is no sense of claustrophobia: the three voices enable the consciousness to resist the isolation of the character and to embody a sense of hope that as long as there is communication and dialogue, there is hope. In this way, Gao creates a transformation of his character. Such a metamorphosis is an alternative to Kafka's whose work he references several times in the book as representing the individual as an "insect" (Gao: 2012: 56). Unlike Gregor in Kafka's "Metamorphosis" (1915), Gao's characters can communicate and freely move. One source of this movement is Gao's understanding of the Chan mind and the logic of karma as a process of movement through the space created in and by the mind.

In the next chapter, Gao once again separates himself from twentieth-century linguistic philosophy when he dismisses the view that aesthetic questions should only be posed as linguistic questions (Gao: 2012: 65). Gao wants to activate "direct perceptions that lead to artistic creation" (Gao: 2012: 65). While this chapter focuses on visual art, it develops themes announced in preceding chapters. Gao is concerned with concrete expressions of beauty, not theoretical explanations of it. In this, he is voicing his objections to theories replacing the concrete work of art, much as Tom Wolfe argues against postmodern abstract expressionism in *The Painted Word* (1975). "In such theoretical art, the theory of the artist or commentator replaces the work of art by explaining it to others; the explanation is the work

of art." One way Gao develops to avoid misreadings (postmodernist misprisions) of his work is to include in his creations specific characters' observations of language's role in the experience he creates. This is evident in Chapter 58 of *Soul Mountain* which is devoted to how "you" exists in language. In a passage that alludes to Kafka's Gregor, Gao writes:

> Dragging weighty thoughts you crawl about in language, trying all the time to grab a thread to pull yourself up, becoming more and more weary, entangled in floating strands of language, like a silkworm spinning out silk, weaving a net for yourself, wrapping yourself in thicker and thicker darkness, the faint glimmer of light in your heart becoming weaker and weaker until finally the net is a totality of chaos. (Gao: 2000: 351)

To escape this predicament, the character realizes that a new pure language is needed in order for freedom to exist:

> How is it possible to find a clear pure language with an indestructible sound which is larger than a melody, transcends limitations of phrases and sentences, does not distinguish between subject and object, transcends pronouns, discards logic, simply sprawls, and is not bound by images, metaphors, associations or symbols? (Gao: 2000: 351)

These are not theories; they are aesthetic thoughts that represent the mind of the character as he looks for his Way through and in words.

Gao's plea is for painters to abandon such theorizations and return to creating actual, concrete images in works of art:

> The so-called crisis in contemporary art is an ideologically created anxiety. If artists can make a clear assessment of society and themselves, they will be able to continue painting. Art inherently transcends concepts and ideology and has its own sovereign domain, that of images. Return to form creation, and continue to paint. The domain of art must do away with empty talk. (Gao: 2012 :78)

While the language of fiction may be limited in its use of images, the painter has only these images to create without being bound by words or theoretical language. In this sense, Gao the painter and Gao the writer are two people, like two pronouns, who together comprise a complex network of relationships within Gao's overall aesthetics and creation. What he

cannot do in fiction, he can do in painting. There is more than one "domain" in his art and he is free to move between them depending on his specific visions. Put together, as they are in *Aesthetics and Creation*, these domains operate kaleidoscopically to offer many different voices that at the same time are related to each other through Gao's tripartite voice.

In the next and longest chapter, "Another Kind of Aesthetics", he writes about himself as "you", addressing the second person as himself and by implication, the reader. He is thus demonstrating how to think in the way he is discussing, as this chapter offers, as its title suggests, "another" aesthetics; that of the visual. He expands on this non-conceptual view of visual art:

> If the form the artist resorts to is form that has not been infused with human feelings, it remains form only, and the material also remains material only . . . so for it to become an artwork, language has to be added to explain its aesthetic implications. Therefore, this sort of linguistic annotation replaces art and turns it into an explanation . . . when art concepts are used to replace aesthetics, beauty is no longer infused by the artist into the work . . . (Gao: 2012: 110)

For Gao, there is the possibility of a spiritual life existing in images and words. This is unthinkable to a poststructuralist such as Eco who sees signs as empty form. In Gao's aesthetics there is a transformational process by which the spirit is realized in art and the actual voices of the mind and the individual are realized in language. By removing this barrier of concepts, the work of art may communicate with the viewer as that person appreciates the work:

> Whether the work is appreciated depends on whether the work itself is able to enter a dialogue with the person. The two sides of the dialogue require a language of communication, and what communicates best transcends race and nation, language and culture, and history and time; the feelings and consciousness common to everyone make exchange possible and are the basis for art communication between different people. (Gao: 2012: 110)

For communication to happen, the art must be truthful. It also must be realized in images and voices. Gao sees this is an ethical issue:

> The many truths of the artist are simply the visual perceptions of his own eyes and, like beauty, do not exist in universally recognized standards. And truth is the artist's

> belief that his own art expression is his own indispensable link with reality. In the eyes of the artist, truth is the ethics of the artist rather than something that possesses aesthetic meaning. (Gao: 2012: 113)

He links this ethics to the artist's intellect and sensuousness. These in turn are related to the Chan Buddhist view of perception in a practice of detachment:

> The rationality in art must mature into a calm and detached vision that will light up burgeoning perceptions hidden in the darkness and disentangle emotions aroused by the creative impulse; only then does it start to solidify, and only then is beauty manifested in images. Rationality and sensuousness similarly function to direct art. Art creation does not castigate reality, and both perceptions and the intellect are at work in aesthetics. A person's capacity for perception and comprehension is the foundation of aesthetic activities. (Gao: 2012: 117)

These two aspects of aesthetics are to be converted by the artist "into creative power that, through his or her unique talents, is transformed into artwork" (Gao: 2012: 117). This transformation is couched in terms that link Gao's aesthetics to the ideas of Chan Buddhism discussed in section 2 of this essay: he sees that these two forces are "sublimated and manifested as spirituality" (Gao: 2012: 118) that is also in poetry. In the process, perception dissolves rationality. When aesthetic experience is perceived as a personal spiritual force based on each artist's particular vision of reality, the place of the artist's individuality becomes an issue. And this in turn raises once again the ways we perceive the self: "The appreciation of beauty primarily derives from the individuality of the appreciating subject, thereby decreeing that in creation the artist must depend upon the self. However, the self is essentially a chaotic entity, and if allowed arbitrary expression, it would undoubtedly produce unbridled and reckless outpourings. Unless this unrestrained narcissism is controlled by the consciousness, it easily declines into arrogance, posturing, and putting on airs" (Gao: 2012: 119).

Such pitfalls await the postmodern artist and critic who, as discussed above, in Gao's terms, wants to revolutionize art by always doing something theoretically new that overturns traditions in art. To resist these forces, the self seeks salvation:

> From modern art's expression of the self to the extreme elevation of the self by avant-garde artists, there has been wanton expression. The overflowing chaos of the self in contemporary art was uncontrollable, and salvation was sought from concepts.
>
> For the artist to control the self, there is another perspective, that of *you* observing *I* to scrutinize the self, and as if it is *I* observing the external world, so this is not direct outpourings of the self. This kind of perspective is inherent in China's traditional expressive painting, and modernist writers and artists of the West from Kafka to Giacometti may be said to employ a modern formulation of this perspective.
>
> Once *you* detaches itself from the self, both the subject and the object are targeted for observation and scrutiny, and this forces the uncontrollable outpourings and expressions of the artist's blind narcissism to yield to concentrated observation, searching, capturing, or pursuing. While *you* and *I* are eying one another, that dark and chaotic self begins to reveal itself through a third pair of eyes belonging to *he*. (Gao: 2012: 121)

This relationship between the three persons leads to a communicative dialogue: "The questions and the dialogues between *you* and *I*—this form of introspection—invariably takes place under the watchful eye of *he*, who is looking inwards" (Gao: 2012: 121). The artist gains self-consciousness, and thus control of the chaotic self, through "the inner mind talking to itself" (Gao: 2012: 121). In this self-control, he differs from the approach of Camus set out earlier in this essay while not saying anything that would negate that view: he is filtering his perception of the issue through his Buddhist eyes. Only in this way can the artist have a clear starting point for observation of reality, whether inner or outer. The second and third persons determine the position of the first person and make self-perception by that "I" possible. When these three perspectives dialogue, aesthetic perception is transformed into creation:

> The object the artist depicts is not the object but something that has been refracted through the self of the artist: it is a creation. The space perceived in this way is the space of the inner mind, where the three pronouns dialogue with each other as each of them sees, as in Cubism, reality from a different space in the mind. (Gao: 2012: 122)

Insofar as this inner world is not directly visible to the egocentric first person alone, the artist needs these other two perspectives to make it visible. This is Gao's Chan definition of art: "Visual art is about making visible what is not visible" (Gao: 2012: 126). What is in the mind

for Gao is Chan: “Chan is not the absence of everything but a realm in the mind” (Gao: 2012: 127). This is the spirituality of art that Gao calls the “poetic”. This quality is missing from postmodernism: “It simply deconstructs, turns art into nonart and calls it art, or designates nonart matter as art, and most contemporary art is precisely this” (Gao: 2012: 138).

> It would be best for you to return to the literary—that is, return to the human, return to a human perspective: human observation inevitably embodies human feelings . . . During the time of observation something happens—in other words, observation is also discovery, a departure from habitual and customary visual perceptions and capturing the beauty that is hidden in things, and these aesthetic experiences are what artists infuse into what they are painting. (Gao: 2012: 138)

The aesthetic effect is the result of the artist’s powers of observation: “Concentrated observation produces the poetic, and beauty is thus discerned, but it is not something that the object originally possesses” (Gao: 2012: 139).

None of what Gao is saying here should be seen as revolutionary, or an attempt to come up with a startling “new” theory of art. As he admits to “you”: “your method and practice have been to seek to discover new possibilities within the established boundaries of art” (140). This is the key achievement in Gao’s work: instead of accepting John Barth’s (1967) argument that modernism has exhausted all its possibilities and what we now have is the “literature of exhaustion”, Gao understands that traditions do not die. By showing us that there are still many possibilities for creation within the traditions of literature discarded by the postmodernists, Gao is demonstrating that the position of the postmodern aesthetic is untenable. Returning to the work of Kafka, Joyce and Brecht, Gao sees new ways forward. He is able to understand this through his knowledge of what is vibrant in Chinese traditions of art and Chan Buddhism. These roots remain powerful insofar as they voice the human condition and so are able to communicate with Western modernism and all that went before it. He specifically uses the word “return” for this movement to suggest that he goes back to the source of creativity as he turns from one art to another.

He then explains how he prepares his mind to paint, in a way similar to the method he advocates for the neutral actor discussed above. He listens to music and makes notes until his mind is tranquil and he avoids performing at all while he paints. Here, he is separating the domains of his art. He also guards against leaving any traces of the artist because these are not art (Gao: 2012: 142). In all this, he seeks to control the chaos of the mind and to use it as

the aim of his art: “Turn chaos, too, into a process of change, so that it, too becomes interesting” (Gao: 2012: 145). If the artist returns to the creative impulses of the inner mind, form and expression will arise from this inner pulsation. He is an artist because he has the capacity to turn chaotic experiences and impulses into visible images, turning experiences that others may also have experienced into images and, moreover, giving expression to these (Gao: 2012: 154–155).

Later in the book in Chapter 8, “Environment and Literature”, he expands on this turning of chaos into art when he “confronts the vibrant human world and strives to confer upon it an aesthetic expression” (194). To do this, he needs to move beyond competing Eastern and Western art theories, whether they be “state of being” (Gao: 2012:149) or “scatter perspective” (Gao: 2012: 151) ones:

> The artist does not need such sweeping explanations but needs to find new turning points within differences between the art methods of different cultures in order to find his own path. (Gao: 2012: 151)

To move past the ideological and theoretical conflicts between modern Western artistic theories and traditional Eastern ones that may make Eastern artists feel anxious in being left behind or less postmodern, Gao responds by simply casting these anxieties aside:

> If anxieties are cast aside, they are cast aside. This is a form of Eastern wisdom, and not a game with language. Discard time differences, discard art revolutions and the overturning of art, and also let go of tradition, although this does not mean overthrowing it . . . In this instant there is no tradition and no concern for the fashions of the time. It is one person confronting art, confronting the achievements of human art, then observing himself, looking for his own images and methods, painting his own paintings, and seeing what interesting things he can produce. (Gao: 2012: 153)

The act of letting go has been discussed above in terms of Chan thought: it is how we free the mind from attachments by not clinging to things (see Cleary: 1989: 41, 99, 133 and 171). By freeing art from such theoretical forces, Gao sees that “artworks can be allowed to speak for themselves” (Gao: 2012: 157), much as his characters can by using the three perspectives of I, you and he. The recurring movement in Gao’s art is the turn or return to different points of view so as to observe possibilities. A similar move beyond competing Western and Eastern ideologies of literature is envisaged later in the book:

> The constraining of thought is anathema for the writer because spiritual independence and literary autonomy are essential prerequisites for creation . . . As long as it does not shun the real dilemmas of human existence and probes the depths of human nature, it will transcend regional and national boundaries, even transcend different languages; it will be translatable and moreover, transcend national cultures to communicate with the world. That literature possesses inherent universality has always been so from ancient times to the present, in both the West and the East. (Gao: 2012: 200–201)

This freedom to think and write predicates the freedom of literature which Gao sees as the "free articulation of human feelings and thoughts" (Gao: 2012: 208). This freedom exists in each individual writer. It is the individual writer who constitutes literature: and this voice is lost once the writer follows fashions and trends of politics, the market or the exhausted concepts of currently dominant literary theory:

> Literature can only be the voice of the individual writer, but once construed as representative of the people or the mouthpiece of the nation, that voice will certainly be false and will certainly be hoarse and exhausted. (Gao: 2012: 211)

How is this to be done?

> If the writer of today can abolish such personal delusions and adopt a normal attitude in observing with intelligent eyes the many manifestations of life in the universe while coldly scrutinizing his own chaotic self, the work under his pen will be worth reading over and over again. (Gao: 2012: 211)

What makes literature worth reading is that it offers inspiration in the wake of the collapse of postmodernism:

> Today the tide of postmodern thinking seems to have passed and facing these bewildering times of spiritual impoverishment, I think, people must look to literature for inspiration. (Gao: 2012: 213)

He raises a question that has been silenced by postmodernism's insistence on the literary text as a linguistic construct devoid of any social connections:

> Under present conditions, can literature still reflect social reality? Of course it can; it is simply a matter of discarding isms, liberating itself from the framework and dogma of ideology, dispelling the preaching of political correctness, returning to the writer's genuine perceptions, and narrating in the individual's unswervingly independent voice. Even if the voice is extremely feeble and not pleasing for the listener, it is a person's true voice and this is its value as literature. (Gao: 2012: 213)

What makes great literature is its truthfulness about the human condition as seen by each one of us as individuals:

> Literature is the awakening of the individual's consciousness in the sense that the writer is armed with his intuitive knowledge when he observes the human world while scrutinizing the self. He infuses his lucid understanding into his work. The individual's unique understanding of the world is undeniably the challenge of the individual to his existential environment. (Gao: 2012: 214)

This uniqueness is understood as the individual's voice, or in Eliot's words "the individual talent", not a poststructuralist sign or a signified; it is a physical presence:

> For the writer, literature constitutes not signifiers, but vibrant human voices that contain every human emotion and desire. And when the writer is writing, these voices are alive in the heart and mind. The language of literature can be read aloud and also performed; it is dynamic and can come to life on the stage to resonate powerfully amongst readers and audiences. What the writer creates is language reverberating with sound; it is not the language that linguistic research refers to or even can refer to. (Gao: 2012: 217)

To hear and record these voices requires freedom to think which often occurs at the boundaries between things or two or more individuals trying to communicate with each other:

> Fresh thoughts are often born at the boundary between two things, and the long accumulated history of human culture is the continual discovery of new understanding on the foundations of predecessors. Literary and art creation are also like this. (Gao: 2012: 233)

This view of literature teaches us that great art is only possible with freedom of thought and is often created when we "break with existing patterns and find new expressions" (Gao: 2012: 233). The place where this occurs is in the individual writer's confrontation with the self and in the communications that this confrontation engenders.

8

Now that the ways Gao pursues in enunciating his aesthetics and the ways he links this to his creations have been followed, it may be possible to suggest that he does offer a viable alternative to the prevailing dogmas and orthodoxies in academic circles. To have simply summarized his contribution without following him on his way would have been to violate the spirit of his art. He insists not on abstract statements, but in learning by immersing ourselves in the creative process. A more fashionable way of writing about him, such as in poststructuralist terms, would risk being trapped in abstract discourse and dogmatic assertion—the very things he dissociates himself from. Such traps can be seen in the paths followed by Jessica Yeung and Zhou Weihui discussed in the opening section of this essay. Instead of trying to categorize himself as yet another postmodernist, Gao insists on the uniqueness of his achievement, thus perhaps inviting himself to be overlooked by those who subscribe to a particular theory of literature as a language game. However, it should be clear that when we all subscribe to a particular theory, we invite a contrarian's view. Gao's value in the current debates over art is that he is an instance of Karl Popper's (1958) one thousand and first swan, the black one who gives the lie to positivism's notion that the truth is provable based on popularity or generalizability.

Art is an experience for Gao, as it is for any great artist or a sincere reader of that art. The experience transforms us by changing the way we see things and so helping us not to cling to them. If we can see the way the artist sees, we learn something valuable: that there are alternative visions which, by our immersion in them, transform us. This is done through our communication with the work of art as a process at once spiritual and aesthetic. In this way, we experience a living thing, not a set of abstractions.

Gao creates this transformation by returning to the past and seeing it as the living present, to borrow Eliot's words. He reanimates that past through his communication with it. This communication is seen as his confrontation with that art by making out of its traditions new and vibrant works.

In a way, Gao's achievement is attained through a rebellion against the totalizing forces of prevailing failed perceptions of art and of the individual's place in the world. It has already been suggested that there are links or underground streams between Gao's art and the work of Sartre and Camus. What makes this relationship isn't a form of imitation. Instead, Gao is tapping into the same authentic real human sources of experience that these artists are voicing. After all, this is how traditions survive and in so doing recreate "humankind's shared spiritual wealth" (Gao: 2012: 18) as a "history of the soul" (Gao: 2012: 203). In this, Gao seems to understand art as a religious experience that is informed by his understanding of Chan Buddhism and its spiritual search for the inner mind where time and space exist in ways that make life possible. This approach is most clearly hinted at in the title of his novel *One Man's Bible* (2002). In Buddhist terms, his quest is to find ways of transforming perception into enlightenment (Gao: 2012: 38-39) by confronting the chaos of the mind and shaping it in dialogical terms as a communicative act in cold and detached perceptions.

Such communication is only tenable if the voice we hear and use is an individual one, whether it is our own voice as a reader or the voice of the individual character Gao records. The uniqueness of the individual voice constitutes its challenge to the environment we each are in (Gao: 2012: 214). By affirming our unique or individual existence, even if only as "insignificant insects", we find a spiritual release from the anxieties that otherwise would overwhelm us. These anxieties need to be confronted, whether they be about art, the novel, prevailing dogmas or our place in the world.

The best of all possible worlds is the one we create for ourselves in art or in our mind as we respond authentically to our environment, whatever that may be for each one of us. We achieve this when we are conscious of who we are as we communicate with ourselves and others.

Gao's achievement is to describe how creation occurs for him and how we can actually perceive the beauty of that creation in its own terms as well as in our own. By doing this, he offers us release from the traps of current literary and artistic theories that do not seem able to pose such questions let alone offer practical and sincere answers to them. This, at least, should be cause to make us pause and wonder about the efficacy of those theories that seem to dominate critical and artistic discourse at present. If the questions and answers offered by Gao cannot be offered by a particular theory, then is that theory offering very much in terms of understanding issues of aesthetics and creation? Given a choice between a view rich in its traditions and experiences and a view poor in its insights related to actual art,

then we are left with a Hobson's choice: the answer should be obvious for anyone sincerely concerned with the creation and appreciation of art.

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The Art of Gao Xingjian: Metamorphosis and the Grotesque in *Soul Mountain*

Reprinted with permission from *Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics*, eds. Mabel Lee and Liu Jianmei (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2018), 69–80.

In an early review of *Soul Mountain* published in the *New York Times* in 2000 shortly after the novel's English translation was published, Richard Eder suggests: "A novel in theory, *Soul Mountain* is more nearly a collection of the musings, memories and poetical fantasies of a gifted, angry writer."[1]

Such a misprision of the novel may be understandable as a first response from a critic who perhaps did not read the novel in Chinese and who did not have the benefit of the essays collected in *Gao Xingjian: Aesthetics and Creation*.[2] However, when the novel is read in the light of an aesthetics that locates it as a transcultural work, even a translingual one, a different, more challenging reading is possible. When the novel is read while avoiding any attempt to box it into a specifically postmodern approach to writing, as Gao argues, the art takes on different significance:

> Whether the work is appreciated depends on whether the work itself is able to enter a dialogue with the person. The two sides of the dialogue require a language of communication, and what communicates best transcends race and nation, language and culture, and history and time; the feelings and consciousness common to everyone make exchange possible and are the basis for art communication between different people.[3]

The communicants in this process are not those who would normally be understood in the theory of the Western novel. Here, Gao's understanding of Chan Buddhism (Jap. Zen) needs to be taken into account. He has a way of perceiving things that may seem alien to a Western critic who tries to fit *Soul Mountain* into a purely postmodern or already accepted theory of what a novel should be. Such a Western view is seen by Gao as a chaos of "wanton expression":

> The overflowing chaos of the self in contemporary art was uncontrollable, and salvation was sought from concepts.
>
> For the artist to control the self, there is another perspective, that *you* observing *I* to scrutinize the self, and as if it is *I* observing the external world, so this is not direct

> outpourings of the self. This kind of perspective is inherent in China's traditional expressive painting, and modernist writers and artists from Kafka to Giacometti may be said to employ a modern formulation of this perspective. Once *you* detaches from the self, both the subject and the object are targeted for observation and scrutiny, and this forces the uncontrollable outpourings and expressions of the artist's blind narcissism to yield to concentrated observation. While *you* and *I* are eyeing one another, that dark and chaotic self begins to reveal itself through a third pair of eyes belonging to *he*.[4]

The italicized pronouns disrupt the conventional grammar, evoking a double voice that suggests the reader and writer are the intended referents. But they are not only that; the pronouns are also characters in the novel:

> As I listen to myself and you, I let you create a she, because you are like me and also cannot bear the loneliness and have to find a partner for your conversation . . . But let others debate such matters, they are of no consequence for I who am on my journey or you who are on your spiritual journey.
>
> Like me, you wander wherever you like . . . you and I merge and are inseparable. At this point there is a need to step back and to create space. This space is he. He is the back of you after you have turned around and left me . . .
>
> I have established for myself this way of sequencing which can be thought of as a sort of logic or karma.[5]

While this explanation or direction seems Eastern, with allusions to karma and the Way (or Dao), the ideas are also open to Western views: logic is offered as a synonym or alternative to karma (although in Chan, karma is perceived largely as a logical order). Things are being blended in Gao's vision in ways that encourage the reader or the character to accept the occurrence of a double vision:

> The object the artist depicts is not the object but something that has been refracted through the self of the artist; the space perceived in this way is the space of the inner mind, where the three pronouns dialogue with each other as each of them sees, as in Cubism, reality from a different space in the mind.[6]

The significance of this double quality lies in Gao's Chan way of seeing: initial thoughts, perceptions, or words are followed by second ones that purify our minds. This is linked to Gao's method of composing his work when he speaks his words first and then writes them into the novel. There is much more happening in Gao's discourses than meets the casual observer's or critic's eye. A first (or passing thought) reading, such as that evinced by Eder in his early review of the novel, may find the work difficult or confused. However, when the novel is read in terms of Chan Buddhism, we may see in our second thought that Gao is deliberate and clear in what he does, as he is freeing himself from attachments to ideologies, the market, and politics, whose voices are *wu nian* (no thought), to create *bu ran* (unstained) perception. When we come to his work with our own preconceived views of what a novel or art should be, we will probably become lost in our own view and unable to dialogue with the new voices and experiences the artist offers. As in Chan, we need to look at what we read or experience at least twice. This is a form of double vision that is analogous to the hearing of a double voice that works to free us from the attachments we bring to our own passing world, especially if that world is accepted unquestioningly, as it seems to be in the West, although there may be signs that such a narrow way of seeing (*laksanas* or false notions or forms) all art from only a Western perspective seems to be losing sway. The *vijnanas* or aspects of consciousness flow together in Chan to create a sense of continuity within our life now and between our various past and future lives (or forms or works). This is our karma understood as our tradition.

When we read *Soul Mountain* in terms of these Chan flows that we keep in mind, we see that each chapter has no clearly marked contextual beginning or ending, that time and experience flow together, that there is no actual "narrator" but a series of voices talking to themselves and each other, and no "characters" with names. The voices move toward enlightenment through the novel without judging those encountered. Here, the grammar of the perceptions breaks by the use of pronouns in place of conventional names or characters. In this break or gap, the individual's voices come through a purification process that transforms that individual in the aesthetic experience:

> The person affirmed in literature is made into another person or persons. With the help of aesthetics, the writer transforms his experiences and perceptions into different characters and, by doing this, he sublimates his inner anxieties.[8]

While this active aesthetics seems to be chaotic, it is the source of transformational creativity:

> However, the magic of literature lies in the making of another person in the creative process. This helps the writer become detached, allowing him to observe with an eye transcending himself, a third eye, an intelligent eye, that will inform his writing. Therefore, the creative process of writing literature helps the writer purify his inner mind.[9]

For Gao, aesthetics is not a theory used by the reader or student to judge a work; it is the *qi* or energy that flows from the communication process in the creator's mind as voices are fused together to create new forms and perceptions that are communicated to the reader following a similar process of enlightened involvement in reading the novel. In this way, the reader needs to be translingual and transcultural by absorbing these perceptions into understanding and enlightenment to become, like Gao, an ethnographer of the spirit.

Gao Xingjian's aesthetics as enunciated in his *Aesthetics and Creation* and embodied in *Soul Mountain* are rooted in his position as a Chinese writer working in the West. He creates in many different modes and in at least two languages: Chinese and French. (This does not take account of the translation of his work into other languages.) Within his works, there are other mixings of genres and voices from the tradition of Asian and Western art.

To create on the border between cultures, to transcend cultures, to move between cultures: these are the characteristics of great art, and always have been. Such are the achievements of Dante and Rabelais, and Shakespeare in the West, and of Wu Cheng'en and Cao Xueqin in China. Such artists make these shifts and changes through the medium of their language. What makes such transformations possible are the building blocks of language: its heteroglossia, its diglossia, its code-mixing qualities. By putting together voices, perceptions, images of our world, the great artist represents realities that, while appearing new, are composed of elements of the old placed together in new ways. These combinations of elements are the sources of art's transformational power to change or metamorphosize itself through the aesthetic of grotesquerie.

Gao Xingjian's art transcends the borders commonly set between Eastern and Western cultures; he achieves this by combining elements of European and Chinese cultures in his novel *Soul Mountain* which, in its own forms, combines other elements of his art along with other genres in a major aesthetic achievement that may point a new way for others to reconfigure the relationships that shape and define our world. By doing this, we break up the monological voice of authoritarianism much as Rabelais did when he signalled the end of the European Middle Ages and the birth of the Renaissance. In this regard Gao seems close to the

image of the artist espoused by M.M. Bakhtin. Michael Lackner and Nikola Chardonnens sense this relationship when they note that Gao's variety of artistic forms (poetry, drama, film, painting, as well as fiction) are a polyphony of voices. But they refrain from expanding this link because they see Bakhtin as "postmodern."[10] While disagreeing with their categorizing of Bakhtin, it is possible to expand on their insight regarding the relationship between the Russian critic and the Chinese writer, both of whom were working from experience with totalitarian regimes that fostered the monologue of authority rather than the freedom of the individual's voices. Bakhtin did this through his study of Rabelais's imagery that combined heterodox elements to form new grotesque forms and languages. Gao achieves such a powerful breakthrough in the novel hundreds of years later by in part returning to the old world of Chinese literature, such as in *Journey to the West* where different modes of narration and characterization are blended in the grotesque figures of Monkey and Pigsy. The similarities between Rabelais and Wu Cheng'en are not signs that one artist is following another blindly. Instead, when we remember Gao's insistence that all great art comes from the same wellsprings of telling the truth about experience, the barriers and borders that have separated Eastern and Western aesthetics for too long, especially in Western theories of art, are transcended. On the deepest of human levels, the art of China and France, the East and the West, have always been working in the same vein. For great artists, the low and high voices in a culture are fused in a dialogue of many voices, or what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia, and the world is turned upside down in their art as we are made to see things in new double forms and visions, and to speak and listen in many voices.

Gao uses this insight that is consistent with his Chan way of seeing and organizing his materials to chart the Dao of enlightenment of his multi-voiced narrator as he, you, and she ascends from the environmentally polluted foot of *Soul Mountain* to the top, just as Dante ascends from Hell to Paradise in *The Divine Comedy*. With his narrator as an ethnographer, Gao describes all the different ways of life encountered on this journey and puts them together in a narrative flow that segues from one voice or reality to another in a jumble of experiences that slowly take shape as the novel moves on. His mixture of genres, characters, and languages of the various voices is an affirmation of the freedom of the artist to represent experience as it is encountered without blocking it out or homogenizing it by forcing it through a filter of preconceived notions of what a novel is or what an artist's job should be. Without resorting to an overt ideology to excuse his blending of styles, Gao knows that the work of Beckett, Kafka, and Brecht prefigures his own methods, while at the same time being confident that his Chinese roots are yet another stream that flows into his art to make the new

fusion of different things more aesthetically powerful. To see this force, we need to follow a stream in the novel closely. Chapter 19 opens with a page-long utterance or sentence that jumbles (the word is "Rabelais's") images that reveal themselves to be a scene of wild lovemaking that blends the animal and the human:

> On this chilly late-autumn night, dense heavy darkness encloses a totality of primitive chaos; indistinguishable are sky and earth, trees and rocks, and needless to say the road; you can only stay transfixed, lean forward, put out both arms to grope, to grope in this thick dark night; you hear it in motion, it is not the wind in motion but this darkness which is devoid of top bottom left right distance and sequence; you are wholly fused in this chaos, conscious only that you once possessed the outline of a body, but that this outline in your consciousness is rapidly vanishing . . . you feel it is a dream; there is no need to be anxious but you can't help being anxious because it is too strangely tranquil.[11]

While "you" may be understood as the narrator's other voice, it is also the reader who feels these emotions as he or she is struck by the underpunctuated mixture of images that is Gao's prose at this point. Slowly, we realize that the narrator has been making love and that such actions are seemingly animalistic:

> She struggles, calls you an animal! She has been stalked, hunted, torn apart, devoured. Ah . . . this dense palpable darkness, primordial chaos, no sky, no ground, no space, no time, no existence and no non-existence; non-existence exists so there is non-existence of existence . . . human and animal invoking primitive darkness; forest tiger in agony . . . the animal bites, roars, and possessed by spirits, jumps and leaps.[12]

The wild man, the shaman, the physical and spiritual, the chaos of a ritualistic act, all are fused into a grotesquerie of poetic images that demands that readers lose themselves in the turbulence of the language and feel the experience being represented. Life is being magically transformed in the chaos of language that is in the consciousness of the characters. We are in their streams of inner and outer experiences as we feel the blending of their relationship in the chaos of words. By undergoing this experience, we understand them by being mimetically involved in their lives at this point as they shamanistically metamorphose into various shapes. The chapter ends with three apparently disconnected utterances, sentences, paragraphs in a story the girl asks you to tell:

You love me,
The girl was seduced by the snake,
The snake is my big brother.[13]

The ancient roots of what is happening here may be traced to Lu Ji's *The Art of Writing*:

The interactions of sounds and tones are like
The five colours that enhance each other:
Although they dwell and vanish by no common rule,
And their tortuous, intricate ways permit no liberty,
Yet if a poet masters the secret of change and order,
He will channel them like directing streams to obtain a Fountain.[14]

It may also be related to Western art through the aesthetics of the grotesque, as described by Bakhtin:

> These forms seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed. There was no longer the movement of finished forms, vegetable or animal, in a finished and stable world; instead, the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into the other, in the ever incomplete character of being.[15]

The similarities between the various aesthetics suggests that there is a deep folk element to all art that is transcultural and cuts across languages, times, and spaces.

Gao Xingjian's framing of his novel as the records of an ethnographer who searches for the folk roots of China after he is given a reprieve from what seemed to be a death sentence misdiagnosis of cancer is not carelessly jumbling things together as "the musings, memories and poetical fantasies"[16] suggested by Eder. Instead, we should understand his literary art as a major achievement that places cultures, languages, and art forms together in ways that are deeply embedded in both Western and Eastern art. His work may be the first major blending of the cultures that points to new ways for the artist that are also ways back to the sources and traditions seemingly forgotten, until someone such as Gao unearths them and changes them into something so new and surprising that our initial bewildered responses blind and deafen us to what is before our eyes and in our ears. The languages of art need more ethnographers like him who are willing to take risks with their art if we are to bridge

the (often illusory or false) divides that have kept apart things that should be together. The language of the grotesque seems appropriate in any effort to put together arts and cultures from different times and spaces to heal the spiritual wounds that recent history has often foisted on us as the only way to understand that East and West can never meet. His work is itself a combination of what may appear to an ear with only Western aesthetics as it has been practiced recently in mind as strange and "grotesque" in the negative sense of the term. The deep cultural affinities, the elective ones, that all great art shares are a language that allows its artists and their readers to communicate with each other in the terms of art—high and low (diglossic), Chinese, French, and English (heteroglossic)—and to see the future coming out of the past as a way forward in our struggles to give voice to the truths of human nature that have never changed in their fundamentals, yet are also in a constant state of flux that is at the heart of aesthetic metamorphosis. Such art will challenge and disturb us at first as it confronts our comfortable sense of reality. But, as Gao states emphatically:

> Literature confronts human beings, individual concrete living human beings . . .[17]
>
> Literary works are more truthful than histories written by authorities . . . Humankind is thus provided with a history of the soul that is more truthful.[18]

Notes

1. Richard Eder, "Books of the Times: A Dreamlike Chinese Journey Haunted by Past and Present," *New York Times*, December 18, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/18/books/books-of-the-times-a-dreamlike-chinese-journey-haunted-by-past-and-present.html#:~:text=Share%20full-,article.
2. Gao Xingjian, *Gao Xingjian: Aesthetics and Creation*, trans. Mabel Lee (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2012).
3. Gao, "Another Kind of Aesthetics," in Gao, *Aesthetics and Creation*, 110.
4. Ibid., 121.
5. Gao Xingjian, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2001; first published in Chinese in 1990), 312–314.
6. Gao, "Another Kind of Aesthetics," 122.
7. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, 312–313.
8. Gao, "Environment and Literature," in Gao, *Aesthetics and Creation*, 199.
9. Ibid., 200.

10. Michael Lackner and Nikola Chardonnens, eds, *Polyphony Embodied: Freedom and Fate in Gao Xingjian's Writings* (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2014), 3.
11. Gao, *Soul Mountain*, 113–114.
12. Ibid., 114–115.
13 Ibid., 116.
14. Translated by Shih-Hsiang Chen and Sam Hamill, http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/LuChi.htm, retrieved July 26, 2016.
15. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984; first published in Russian in 1965), 32.
16. Eder, "Books of the Times."
17. Gao, "Environment and Literature," 196.
18. Ibid., 203.

Reading Lu Xun in Sydney during the 1970s: Prefigural Memories

I almost began this attempt to remember things apparently past with what may have seemed to some as an unrelated epigraphical warning or signpost that would have been from a study of Alfred Hitchcock:

> One finds oneself drawn into a prehistory of the afterlife of the present, a zone of unfinished epistemo-political wars, still contested histories, teletechnic events not yet grasped.[1]

The jump from pre-Maoist China to my experience in Bangkok where I write this is a large enough a gap. But linking Lu Xun to Hitchcock will cause readers to doubt my own sanity and suspect they are reading the essay of a madman. I want to assure the reader that I am not mad and that the meaning of this quote will become apparent as I work my way back in the chronotope to Sydney in the 1970s when and where I first read Lu Xun. History is being contested just as much nowadays as it was in post-Manchu China. Sometimes, we may have to contest our own histories and cast doubts on our memorialising writings. I jump again.

Lu Xun prefaces his first collection of stories with words that seem to anticipate my own attempts to remember him:

> When I was young, I, too, had many dreams. Most of them came to be forgotten, but I see nothing in this to regret. For although recalling the past may make you happy, it may also make you lonely, and there is no point in clinging in spirit to lonely bygone days.[2]

The past seems problematic; not something to cling to in your spirit. Like the narrator in "A Madman's Diary" and the brother he meets again, "after a separation of many years".[3] Returning to my "old home", I now meet him again. Memory may be faulty or a barrier to the truth. The narrator of "Kung I-chi" mentions that he can remember Kung as he would laugh whenever Kung came to the tavern where he drank.[4] Kung's memory is also called into doubt as he could not pass his examinations in the classics yet his speech is peppered with

1. Tom Cohen, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies: Secret Agents* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xii.
2. Dated 3 December 1922, Peking: Lu Xun, *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (New York: Norton, 2003), 1.
3. Lu Xun, *Call to Arms*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), 1.
4. Ibid., 14.

archaisms, from his studies.[5] Details are sparse as Lu Xun is writing impressionistically; he avoids overburdening his narrative with specifics and facts that may lead to his "clinging in spirit to lonely bygone days". This is what happens when the narrator of "In the Wine Shop" returns to the vaguely named (perhaps in the Gogol tradition) town of S– only to find those he knew had left:

> When I passed the gate of the school, I found that too had changed its name and appearance, which made me feel quite a stranger. In less than two hours my enthusiasm had waned, and I rather reproached myself for coming.[6]

Why do I feel that these observations anticipate my own experiences when I return to any text read long ago, and to this writer's texts now in particular? Has he shaped my ways of seeing writing without my being consciously aware of it: Is what I write now the figural realisation of what I seem to have absorbed back in Sydney decades ago? If so, then have I cannibalised him and so transformed him (as I do above when placing myself in his story) that he now seems to be a part of me, much as those we cannibalise become part of us . . . as he notes in several of his stories? While my thoughts about the Sydney of my youth are distant to me and this bothered me at first as I tried to remember the past in a specific academic way, it now seems that such "clinging" is wrong, as Lu Xun teaches: I should not let my doubts stop me from writing what I have to write here. In this way, he is with me in spirit, guiding me in ways that I could hardly have guessed when I first met him in Chinatown in the late 1970s. In a perhaps tangential way, I sense him as an unrecognised presence in a series of stories I started to write a decade ago that were titled after a Montaigne essay, "Of the Cannibals". I realise now as I write this that I may be transforming myself into what I read, and that more of Lu Xun is entering me as my style of writing begins to echo his when he writes of the madman's diary, as much as he may be anticipating his own style in this and later stories:

> The writing was most confused and incoherent, and he had made many wild statements; moreover he had omitted to give any dates, so that only by the colour of

5. Ibid.

6. Lu Xun, *Wandering*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), 20.

> the ink and the differences in the writing could one tell that it was not written at one time.[7]

Like a narrator in many of Lu Xun's stories, my memories of names, places and stories connected to my experience of reading Lu Xun in Sydney back in the 1970s are often obscured or dormant. Until I return to the scenes from the past, I may not know what has happened back then or how things have changed in the times that intervene between my first experiences and the things I find upon my return. This lag or gap is not a barrier for Lu Xun . . . or for me. The lack of names and dates allows me to use my imagination to reconstruct things and to see how time has changed these things in reality as much as in my memory.

Four decades of memories to deal with since I first encountered Lu Xun (or Lu Hsün as I then knew him in the Wade-Giles form) in the East Wind Bookshop (my version of a mirthless downstairs at the Wine Shop) in lower Pitt Street in Chinatown in Sydney, and what have I learned? As an expatriate from Australia for the past twenty-four years, my memories lack any concrete or physical reminders of that time when as a student I stumbled on his works while I looked for cheap copies of the four great Chinese classical novels imported from the People's Republic of China at bargain basement prices. What I found were, I vaguely remember, to be four volumes of his selected works translated by the Yangs, whom I knew nothing about. It is their words that serve as my memory-charts as I try to recall how Lu Xun fitted into the world I was experiencing back then.

In trying to activate, recall, invent memories of reading Lu Xun's stories in Sydney over forty years ago, much has changed for me in the vast space of time through which the reading experience seems to have morphed, as though through a process of metempsychosis, to produce who I am today. How those experiences in the 1970s have in part made me who I now am, how they prefigure me in Bangkok trying to write about Asian literary issues while at the same time I am trying to come to terms with another past . . . the one I seem to remember back in Sydney as a graduate student trying to establish links between Asian aesthetics and Western writers such as Brecht while also trying to find my way through the mine field of what was postmodernism *avant la lettre* . . . these are the fragmentary perceptions I am now trying to embody as I use Lu Xun's own tropes for dealing with the power of memory to shape or reshape what is happening in the present (and, at the same time, changing what happened in the past and making possible new figural shapes in the future). I will try to embody efforts at remembering Lu Xun as I read him then in terms of his own

7. Lu Xun, *Call to Arms*, 1.

aesthetics of memory which I still retain a powerful memory of being impressed by when I read him back then.

That he could accomplish the highly complex task in ways that are deceptively simple, with modesty, an apparent simplicity, and in a language devoid of overt literariness, while I find myself entangled in linguistically labyrinthine complexities is a strong indicator to me that my struggle to return to the scenes of reading is going to be complicated and perhaps less figural than I would have hoped as I bring with me the baggage of the intervening years that I seem not to have jettisoned yet. But, then again, the writing of this piece may be an act of therapy or spiritual medicine, much as Lu Xun saw his own writing: I too may become "Lu Xun" as I re-embody his spirit in my words and memories.

My words are cluttered as I scramble to find memory hooks to stimulate my writing. This is a mistake I should not be making. I should remember what I have learned about Chinese ways of thinking and writing since I moved to Asia in part to escape the madness of poststructuralism that was sweeping through academe at that time. My mistake may have been to have decided to come to terms with that past and at the same time find a way of approaching Lu Xun by confronting one of the leading lights in Theory, Fredric Jameson, whose "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" reduces Lu Xun to a national allegorist, as Jameson sees all "third world" "underdeveloped" writers must be . . . at least to the sophisticated American academics who have a theory to support them. Without any attempt to understand the deep cultural heritage that Lu Xun works with, the one I searched for in the four classics back in the 1970s in East Wind Bookshop, and without including any Chinese critics in his judgments, Jameson is able to pontificate on the gap he senses between the audience Jameson writes for and the reader of Lu Xun in some "Other" place, time or space:

> We sense between ourselves and his alien text, the presence of another reader, or the Other reader, for whom a narrative, which strikes us as conventional or naïve, has a freshness of information and a social interest that we cannot share.[8]

For Jameson, to know as this "Other" knows we would have to "acknowledge an existence and a situation unfamiliar and therefore frightening—one that we do not know and prefer not

8. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): 66.

to know".[9] Perhaps, much has changed since Jameson wrote these words; the world he speaks of is not my world. I have come to know more about the contexts and experiences Lu Xun has shared with the world . . . by living here for decades and reading the historical and literary records of this "other world" that the postmodernists and other academics have up until recently not evinced much interest in learning. Perhaps, this means that Jameson's responses are now historically dated and that new readers with fresh experiences are coming to read Lu Xun with new eyes, ears and hearts. The tangled web of such theorising has become an alien one that many students now may "prefer *not* to know". The irony is there.

Instead of trying to fit the stories into the narrative of theories such as Jameson's, I prefer to approach the task with the knowledge I have gained from my experiences in Asia and from writing on Chinese literature over the past few decades. While Lu Xun's attitude to Chan (Chinese Buddhism) is not the topic here, I feel that many of the ways that Chan has saturated Chinese culture may be found in some of his approaches to the perception and representation of reality. These are ways not countenanced in Western philosophies or theories up to now.

Free from immediate attachments that may have come from still being in Sydney as I write, the internal and external objects I recall are detached from my thoughts. My memories are not inscribed in stone; they float freely and in ways that allow me to respond more in terms of a Chan Way of perception and representation than in an abstract 'theoretical' way such as that used by Jameson that distances the texts as objects devoid of any cultural roots. This is one of the benefits of a time lapse that Lu Xun's narrators often register when they tell their stories of returning to places and people they have left long ago. My first readings of these things that occurred back in the 1970s were impressions that lacked the distance of time. As *The Platform Sutra* suggests, a second view or perception leads to enlightenment. This second sight, downplayed by Ha Jin in his introduction to Lu Hsun's (in the Wade-Giles form published by Norton) stories when he sees the last collection of Lu Xun's stories as less significant as they are retellings of old stories, is actually the point of his return to the classic stories that he remembers in new ways in "The Flight to the Moon". By moving around in Lu Xun's fiction, I try to follow the spirit of the Dao or Way where, as in many of the manuals on writing and history from the past, excerpts or fragments of text are allowed to flow together in no apparently fixed order. This is how Lu Xun shapes his "A Madman's Diary" and "The True Story of Ah Q" in particular. In a letter to Li Shanglao, the Chan teacher

9. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism".

Zhantang observes: “Those who do not know how to adapt stick to the letter and cling to doctrines, get stuck on forms and mired in sentiments.”[10] The analogies between the narrative methods of Lu Xun and the Chan approaches to perception seem to reinforce my own way of approaching the task I have before me. In this way, I seem to be following the advice of Foyan, another Chan teacher, who counselled his followers: “Search back into your own vision—think back to the mind that thinks.”[11] Once you realise that your emptiness and mindlessness are positive states and that your rationalisations impede your inner perception, you start to move away from the theory-driven responses encouraged by Western writers such as Jameson that were leading me astray and into complicated ideas and language that are alien to the ways of writing found in Lu Xun.

In this way, I sense a relationship between Lu Xun and a later Chinese writer, Gao Xingjian, who states in his own aesthetics and statements on his Way of writing that it is best to keep a distance from one’s characters.[12] Am I seeing Lu Xun as a prefigural voice for Gao Xingjian or am I seeing Lu Xun through the eyes of his fellow writer Gao Xingjian? The figural pattern seems further reinforced by the observation that just as Ah Q sees himself as an insect, so does Gao’s “I” see himself in *Soul Mountain*. While there may be underground streams here to Kafka and other more apparently modern Western creative voices, there is certainly something deeply within the Chan philosophical traditions that seems to link the two writers in ways that I did not see when I first read Lu Xun in the time before Gao began to write.

In making this claim, I am distancing my reading of Lu Xun from the monumentalisation of him orchestrated by Mao. As a monument, a writer becomes fixed in stone, stationary, and given a status that seems for all time. But such monuments are made to foster the forgetting of the person whose form has been shaped into a public thing to serve other purposes, to lock him in that almost Kafkaesque death chamber of an “iron house without windows, almost indestructible”.[13] Frozen in time, the monument encourages those who gaze on it to forget the living person: it may be yet another form of cannibalisation in which the living art is officially sacrificed and the parts (the stories) are absorbed into an ideology that allows those who build the monument to go on with what they are doing.

10. Thomas Cleary, ed. and trans., *Classics of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston: Shambhala, 2005), 1: 40–1.
11. Ibid., 1: 171.
12. Gao Xingjian, *Aesthetics and Creation*, ed. and trans. Mabel Lee (Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2012), 32.
13. Ibid., 5.

Only by giving the writer a future other than the one he is officially memorialised as apparently prefiguring can we now keep Lu Xun's "remains" alive, as part of a living archive that brings him, as in this essay, to Australia and to a new location that may allow him to find new life. In doing this, I may be following his own approach announced in his *Call to Arms* preface of using my writing to address specific forms of soul sickness: "The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement."[14] The new ideas were embodied in a journal titled appropriately for the times then and now *NewLife*.[15] The fate he says he feared to meet then was "to lift up his voice among the living and meet with no response . . . so I began to feel lonely".[16] The feelings he has are those "which I do not like to recall, preferring that it should perish with me".[17] Returning to the past, he copies out ancient texts or "inscriptions". Eventually, he rekindles hope: "I could not blot out hope, for hope lies in the future"[18] and starts to write again, avoiding pessimism so as not "to infect with the loneliness I had found so bitter those young people who were still dreaming pleasant dreams, just as I had done when young".[19] By returning to the past, Lu Xun, like Gao Xingjian whom he prefigures in some ways, gains the strength to go on and make a different future possible.

However, by invoking a past that is shrouded in uncertainty or even avoidance of facts, we may be in danger of having our memories of that monumental past casting doubts on our present and future actions. This danger is embodied by Lu Xun in his dynamics of doubt strategies as in "A Madman's Diary" where we *remember* the doubts the narrator has at the beginning of the story and his distance from the two brothers. These uncertainties shape our reading of the rest of the story which is a recount in diary form of one of the brothers' suspicions. This reading of the rest of the story lies in the future, after we have read the introduction to the story. In this way, Lu Xun's aesthetics seems to draw its power from his understanding of how the past prefigures the future in open or vague ways that are not set in stone or resolved by the narration. These doubts undermine the continued reading of the actual diary with doubts as to who the cannibal is. It may even be possible to offer a new reading of the story that brings out the possibility that the whole story, as encapsulated in its

14. Lu Xun, *Call to Arms*, iii.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., iv.
18. Ibid., v.
19. Ibid., vi.

given form, is the diary and that the narrator is the cannibal, as he lives off the lives of his characters, or is even one of the brothers lying to us, in the tradition of the unreliable narrator, to hide his own guilt; a guilt foreshadowed in the preface to the stories. Such a reading may not be possible in the iron house that is this small essay.

Restraint here is necessary as I often doubt the role of the critic or theorist who eats the corpse of the dead writer by reinventing the old text as a ventriloquist's dummy mouthing the thoughts of the critic and calls it academic life, or who kills the writing to make it contortionistically conform to a preconceived idea from another place and time. Such wilful misreading is not what I hope to do. From Lu Xun's "Village Opera", I learn the lesson about the benefits of distance as a way of keeping the past as it is in others' minds distanced from my own memories. His narrator forgets many things—such as the name of the Peking opera he first tried to see, the date of his second attempt, and the title of the Japanese book on theatre—in order to clear the ground for what he wants to remember. Such concrete specific facts may close the story into an "iron house" and distract his memory from the feelings he wants to transmit to others. Ironically, the experience he does record in graphic detail is of watching an opera from a distance, as the Japanese book suggests. This memory is summoned by his reading the book which he admits "put into words what had remained unformulated in my mind".[20] This experience prefigures the two attempts of the narrator to see Peking opera and actually stimulated him to want to try to see it later. The reason he feels motivated to see the Peking opera is that he saw the village opera from a boat in the distance. What he recalls is not what happened in the cluttered and noisy opera that he can't see clearly from his distance in the boat. Instead, he recalls the events and acts connected to those of his friends in the boat . . . events that may not have occurred if he had been close to the opera. What he in fact registers are the ethnographic details of the group of observers who are not actually in the official audience; they form a distant, informal (even secret or second, not "Other") audience. This approach rings bells with me about Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" where the actual fight is only a pretext for recording other aspects of Balinese culture which formed the basis of his anthropological method. As Geertz notes:

20. Ibid., 140.

> As in more familiar forms of close reading, one can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else.[21]

Lu Xun had learned this lesson long before as he prefigures it in many of his works. I too am re-learning this now as I seem to have moved a long distance from where I began. But such shifts in perspective have been a part of my life in Asia since the early 1990s. The fluidity of approach taught by Geertz was learned by him in his fieldwork experiences in Asia. While it may be true that we invent our own precursors, as Borges notes about Kafka and his precursors who only become revitalised once a later writer creates a new context in which what had remained dormant or hidden in the prefigural writer now becomes visible: "Every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."[22]

While Lu Xun's characters may seem to forget the past or remember it vaguely, we cannot. His spirit remains alive and often may be found in surprisingly distant places. Such discoveries seem to break him free from the iron house or prison he seems to have been interred in by ideological critics and politicians. By writing this essay from a distance to Australia and the past four decades ago, I have tried to learn from him how distance often serves as a muse that opens new doors to let light in to our world and that reinvigorates the past: it creates possible spaces in which to think in new ways, perhaps even emic ones that encourage us to enter the text's space and experience it as if for the first time. In so doing, this essay takes on an ethnographic tone to register the ways Lu Xun's writings and my memories of it have revitalised my spirit: he continues to work his spiritual medicine in new times and places for those who are open to his medicinal spirit.

21. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 453.

22. Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors", in *Other Inquisitions: 1937–1952* (University of Texas Press, 1964), 106.

The End May Be Near But So Is the Beginning: An Ecological Reading of the Proxemics of Death in the Fictions of Pira Canning Sudham

Textual Overview

This essay offers a reading of Pira Canning Sudham's *Shadowed Country* (2004). All direct quotations from Sudham's work are referenced in parentheses only by a page number from this novel. The text of this novel absorbs other, previously published, fictions and non-fictions written by Sudham. As the reader of this essay may not be familiar with the prior versions or lives of these texts, it is necessary to provide here a brief contextual overview of them. The body of *Shadowed Country* includes two major sections. The first is titled *Monsoon Country* and the second is *The Force of Karma*. The text of *Monsoon Country* was first published in 1993 and later reformed and re-published in 2002 before being again reformed and reborn in *Shadowed Country*. The second major section is a reformation of *The Force of Karma* (2002).

The argument offered in this essay is that a critical awareness of these texts in their prior incarnations may help the reader understand that Sudham's Buddhist and literary approach to the theme of death in *Shadowed Country* is embodied as a textual metaphor in the way he creates new fictions out of the bodies of his already published works. While many non-fiction writers may change their texts as second or third editions, this willingness to transform his fictions is a distinguishing characteristic of Sudham the factionalist who incorporates in a seemingly incorporeal form his fictions and non-fictions in subsequent writings in a re-creative way that makes sense once his Buddhist approaches to death are understood. The mutability of his texts is apropos in his work in the context of his concerns with how things may (or may not) change in the material world of Thailand and in that world as it is metamorphosed in his work. For a Buddhist, the birth and death of texts is conceivable. So is the idea that as a text is incorporated into another text, both texts change in a way that suggest the unfolding of a lotus: as texts are reborn, new information that was previously buried in either the texts' prior lives or the writer's experience is brought to the reborn textual surface. To mark this rebirth, the author has also expanded or metamorphosed his name, adding "Canning" to it for *Shadowed Country*, suggesting the rebirth of the author as much as of the work.

Introduction

To a Western reader, Pira Canning Sudham's novel *Shadowed Country* may seem to represent death in a culturally alien way. Sudham's approach to the experience of death, unsentimental and detached as it is, does not offer the reader the opportunity to share through empathy or sympathy the central character of the novel, Prem Surin's death experiences. The distance between Prem and those who die seems emotionally neutral if not cold. There is no dwelling on the moment of death or any introspection on the meaning of the experience itself. The novelist often only registers the fact that a person has died; and this usually is conveyed to the reader after the fact in terms of the narrative time. The deaths witnessed by Prem, of those who have shaped his experience and been close to him, do not lead him to any Hamlet, Lear, Othello or Cleopatra moments, there are no Antony-like orations or reflections on the glory of the dead. Such impassioned moments of eulogy, while in place or appropriate in a Christian Western tragic experience of death, are foreign to the Thai experience where funerals are silently experienced except for the chanting of Pali scriptures by the monks. Death in the West seems to be a time to turn back to the life of those who have died; but for the Thai, the moment of death is understood as a time for the dead to move on into the between, the time-space through which the dead move towards their next life.

Sudham is conscious of this difference and how it will shape his intended Western readers as he writes his novel in English. He opens *Shadowed Country* with a prologue in which the thoughts of the dying Marquess of Wealdon are couched in terms of what a Western reader would be familiar with when thinking of the death of a major character in a novel. Wealdon is on his death bed, lying "fretfully" enervated by "voices and images of things past" in an echo of Shakespeare's Sonnet (XXX) as much as of the Scott Moncrief translation of Marcel Proust's novel of memory and time as *The Remembrance of Things Past*. Wealdon's dying moments are filled with a clinging regret for the loss of his children and the sentiments he feels when he recalls times with them which failed to deliver the happiness he hoped for. He addresses his dead son in the second person, as he echoes Lear's "nothing comes of nothing" response to his daughter Cordelia:

> Gerald, I planted those rhododendrons and azaleas for you and yours to enjoy and to walk on a carpet of bluebells. Alas . . . It came to nothing. Nothing at all. (24)

He is filled with anger and attachment when he remembers the death of his children in India where he worked in the Raj:

> But now I wouldn't even go near the damned trees he planted to remind us of that God-forsaken country. It's bad enough for me just to think of Anne and you both buried there. They gave me some dubious reasons as to why they would not let me bring you back . . . Health? Political? (24)

This dramatic monologue addressed to the dead goes on until he dies, alone and in pain:

> At this point, the unattended cardiac patient gaped, gasped and convulsed, making a vain attempt to breathe. A moment later, the long-suffering Marquess passed out of our troublesome world. (26)

In this, the only passage in the novel where death is described in terms of the dying person's immediate physical experience, Sudham offers this image of dying as an entrée to his novel; it activates the schemata of the Western reader of the novel written in English with a number of familiar cultural elements related to death which stress the English or Western frame of reference in which Wealdon lives and dies. Much of the bitterness and clinging exhibited by Wealdon explains his bad karmic forces that will lead to his birth again as a lowly Esarn peasant. The sentiments and sensibilities enervate Wealdon's death. But the expectations evoked by such a representation are deliberately disappointed by Sudham in his narrative of the life of Prem Surin, the reincarnation of the Marquess of Wealdon who grows up as a peasant in Esarn, the poorest part of Thailand, and inherits part of Wealdon's estate as he works off the karma Wealdon had brought onto himself in his colonial service when he massacred hundreds of Indians.

Through the frame of the prologue, Sudham establishes how far apart Wealdon and Prem are: the world of an English aristocrat in the nineteenth century and the world of an Esarn peasant in the twentieth century are related through the experience of reincarnation. The connection is not dwelt on by Sudham; it is meant to be understood by the reader who is aware of the Buddhist frame-of-reference in the novel. And this experience is meant to be understood and felt by the reader as a natural thing; not as a magical device that makes the narrative exotic or spectacularly post-modern in the way say Salmon Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) works through the co-incidence of many Indian children being born at precisely the same moment when India and Pakistan separated from the English empire at midnight. At a deeper level of cultural significance, the two novelists' visions are even more alien to each other. While Rushdie's Western novel of India represents the birth of a new land free from its colonial past, Sudham's work looks at a land dying under the forces of a corrupt

oppression which is turning the world of the novel into a wasteland. Rushdie's world is that of fertility myth; Sudham's is more that of the quest undertaken by a hero which will eventually lead to a just reuniting of things that were falling apart in colonial India.

The novels of Rushdie and Sudham seem worlds apart; Rushdie's myth revolves around the magical element of time while Sudham's is grounded in the typical cultural space of the Thais. The linearity of Rushdie's novel seems alien to the polychronic sense of time and space in Sudham's vision. The bringing together of Muslim and Hindu characters and experience in Rushdie is not matched in Sudham's novel where the world of the novel is more a blend of animism and Buddhism. These differences seem to stem from the different perspectives of the two novelists.

Rushdie sees things as an English writer while Sudham writes as a Thai. For all the strangeness of Rushdie's magic realist narrative, his work is culturally closer to the experience of a Western reader than is Sudham's. A reader can enter or access the more post-modern logic of *Midnight's Children* without a deep understanding of Islam or Hinduism but a reader cannot enter the narrative space of *Shadowed Country*, its plotting and characterization, without a deep feel or sense for the ways things are in Thailand. While Rushdie relies on a first person narration to bring the reader into the mind of his characters who telepathically read each other's minds, Sudham's third person narration, even with its strong autobiographical presences, allows Sudham to establish a distance between the reader, the writer and the written text.

The foregrounding of the English setting and its Anglo-Saxon attitudes in the Prologue to *Shadowed Country* suggests that Sudham is aware of the distance of his reader from what will follow in the novel in terms of how Prem will experience his life and the deaths of those around him. The expectations of the Western reader are evoked, only to be challenged by the experience of reading the novel.

The representation of death in *Shadowed Country* is organically related to Sudham's methods of composition and to the roles he sees for himself as much as for his hero Prem as a shaman, a teacher, an artist and a reincarnated person. The transitions between these various lives are major organizing forces in the novel's narrative voice.

To understand the ways Sudham works, the reader needs to have more of a personal sense of the experience of life in Thailand than the reader needs of India to enter, for example, Rushdie's world. Much of this difference stems from the reader's degree of familiarity with many of the schemata the two novelists draw on in their work. An English reader of some breadth would know of the ways of Indians but not so much of the Thais. The

distance between the reader and the text is not an accidental fault of the novel; it is one of the novel's leitmotifs. To understand this proxemics of the novel, its representation of distance, it is necessary to place the novel in its own cultural and historical contexts that go far beyond the stereotype of Thailand as the Land of Smiles; there is much more to Thailand and to Thai attitudes than meets the casual eye of an accidental tourist or reader of Western pulp novels set in Thailand or Asia for that matter. Without a knowledge of, or at least a familiarity with these schemata, a reader may often feel alienated from the responses of the characters in the novel who, because of their differences to the ways a Western reader would interpret the Thai world, may seem distant, artificial or cold; even unrealistic, because of the characters' lack of psychological attachment to the world they live in. The closeness we have been accustomed to feeling with the text of a novel in the West is not the same as the relationship between a Thai reader or writer in English. How a Thai understands the patterns of life and death are nothing like the patterns or ways of understanding a Western reader has experienced.

After describing Thai experience, this essay will look at the ways death structures the writing of Sudham, not in Western terms of finality and permanence, but in Thai terms of flux and impermanence. A Western need for closure and for a strong sense of a fixed terminus or ending is challenged in *Shadowed Country* by Sudham's alien, un-Western approach to living and writing. If the reader can overcome his or her prejudices and experience the novel in a different way, the reader may learn much about the art of dying as a way off the wheel of suffering, attachment and the need for permanence in one's life which we in the West seem to understand in terms of our notion of Self or Ego. Once such an experience of reading can be attained, the reader may find that Sudham's claim to significance is that his work offers a spiritual path of liberation from the oppressive presence of death's shadow and from the commensurately oppressive demythologizing ways we have read fiction in the West as an unreal and distant thing that bears no immediate relation to the life we live in the real world.

Cultural Space and the Place of Death in the Thai Mind

Thai everyday experience is much more shaped by forces that have been downplayed in the West since the time of the Enlightenment with the power of the logos over the mythos. The world, as observed by Mulder (1989), is split between different forces of power; the often chaotic powers of the spirit world (*umnart*) and the moral force of the mother, the teacher and others (*khuna*). This division of the world is as much Buddhist as it is animist.

The *sing saksit* (supernatural ceremonial) powers of the spirit world are amoral, contradictory and chaotic. They are to be ameliorated or influenced by right ceremony, offerings. These powers have no logical rules or reasons for influencing things in one's life. They are whimsical. The person who deals with such power is distant to it; there is no personal relationship between the power and the person. One's world is divided into local, district and wider powers, each with its own zone of proximal distance from the person. This power is not to be confused with *itiphon*, the dark power of gangsters and criminals, though the danger of offending a person who is *itiphon* is similar to the danger of offending animistic power. Both can bring about death. The major difference is that the *umnart* power is always mollified with the right ceremonial initiative of the person who wants to placate that power.

The power of the local spirits, the *praphuum*, is limited by the distance of their power reach. Once one moves away from their place of power, their power diminishes. One then moves into the zone of another power. These zones also shape one's life spaces. The ultimate threat of chaos is death, where one goes through the various cycles of hell (*narok*). To ensure one's safety in this chaos, one follows certain death rituals (*phithii anamongkhun*). These powers are not of the dead; they are supernatural spirits that exist beyond the natural world.

The animistic world view divides social space into the inside and the outside; one is inside or outside the power zone of the spirit. In social terms, this division informs the way a Thai speaks of two types of friends: eating friends and dying friends (*pern gin har ngai* and *pern die har yak*). Dying friends are one's inner family while one's eating friends are in the public sphere outside one's intimate personal space.

The outside world is the world of power, flux and instability while the inside world is the moral (*khuna*) world of the mother and the teacher who care for one. In Thai culture, the teacher (*crue*, the Pali form of "guru") often has more moral authority than a parent. The teacher has no need of *saksit* power, as his or her moral force protects the teacher from any animistic influences.

While power is supernatural, moral force is natural. *Khuna* is the moral obligation one has to one's teacher or parent. There can be no sin (*bap*) in disobeying supernatural power, but sin is the ingratitude one may display towards one's teacher or mother, one's inner circle. *Khuna* is the devotion given by a teacher or a student to a child. It too is ritualistic. The mother gives love while the teacher gives knowledge. Both enable the child to lead a moral life that will have karmic benefits. The mother and teacher are to sacrifice themselves, their happiness and well-being for the good of those in their care. By doing this, there is a bond of

moral debt between the child and the mother or teacher. This bond is the source of the order of one's life which is balanced by the chaotic flux of life outside the inner circle.

The purest form of order for a Thai is Buddhism. This order is beyond the order of human relationships marked by passion and prejudice (*kilesa* or defilement). Buddhism is the way to truth; it is the highest form of goodness (*khun*) understood as wisdom, virtue and compassion. This goodness is the source of liberation. By making merit (*thumboon*), one accumulates power as merit to protect oneself against the *saksit* powers of *umnart*.

The contradictions and conflicts between the inside and outside worlds, between *umnart* and *khuna*, are not resolvable. This view leads to a belief in the chaotic world around one which seems to blend with the Buddhist notion of flux or impermanence (*annicata*). In a world of flux, when one clings to things to seek ownership or permanence, one is asserting that one has a self or ego (*atta*). In such a state of illusion or maya, one clings (*upadana*) to things, including the belief in one's ego which leads one to believe in the possession of things that are actually defilements (*saniyojana*) that lead to selfishness *mamamkara* (possessiveness) which is *moha* (delusion).

The person who is clinging to things for the sake of permanence is in a state of *dukka* (suffering) that can only be broken when he or she realizes the *annata* (not-self). Without *annata*, one is in a state of ignorance (*avijja*) and selfishness; one cannot accept the *sunnata* or voidness of all things including the concept of a self. When one is in a mindful state (*samadhi*) of *sunnata*, one realizes a state of coolness or *nirodha*. The Thais value a cool heart (*jai yen*) and not the hot heart or *jai ron* which causes one to lose face by being attached to the way things happen which produces only *dukkha* or suffering. Only in a cool mind may one reach nirvana (*nibbana* in Pali) and so be free of dependence on birth, decay and death (*jaramaraya*). *Samsara* or the transmigration of the soul or spirit occurs throughout one's life. Each day, the self dies and is born by another form of the self. In this way, the self is understood as impermanent. The karma of yesterday produces the results one experiences today. The wheel of life and death occurs in one's life spans, not only in the death of the body as such. Death-in-life is a closer analogy for *samsara* than reincarnation as understood in the West as rebirth. *Samsara* is a state of flux, not permanence and is ego-free, selfless. This value is linked to the *bunkhun* (moral goodness) of the mother and the teacher who in sacrificing themselves create *khuna* or morality.

Sorrow, despair, pain and suffering exist because one is still under the delusion that one's self is a permanent thing that actually can remain the same throughout one's life. In

Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree (1962), Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explains the problem created by a desire for birth or death:

> If we really understand Dharma we'll shake our heads; we'll want neither birth nor death. However, ordinary people don't want to die. They only want to be born. They want birth without death, and what's more, they want eternal life. Or, if they must die, they want to be reborn. This indeed is grasping and clinging. In short, the person born suffers one way and the person dying suffers another way. Only when there is neither birth nor death, when there is *sunnata*, will there be an end to *dukkha*. (1962: 118–9)

To be free from birth and non-birth is to be void, without a self or ego. He points out that at the moment of death, the mind should be free of desire or clinging:

> When the time of death has truly come, let this feeling [coolness] be present. You should remember that when close to death the mind will gradually slip away. As the body runs down near its end, awareness will gradually disappear. You will forget more and more until you forget everything. You won't know what time it is, whether it's day or night; you won't be able to tell where you are or whose house you are in; you won't even be able to remember your name. But the awareness that nothing is worth having can stay on as the mind's companion to the very end. Volunteer for the remainderless quenching! . . . With this skilful means, the mind will be able to dissolve itself into the *sunnata* which is *nibbana*. (1962: 124–125)

This quenching of desire comes with a correct understanding of the void there is in place of the illusion of a self. *Vipassana* is the clear insight into the true nature of things, the what's what of life and death. Without this insight, one will be in the wilderness of *vattasamsara* which are the endless cycles of wandering, birth and death. When one has *jati* or ego-birth, one is exposed to the accompanying delusion of death; there is a self that is prone to die and this self clings to life or death. In such a mind, one lacks the insight to accept the voidness of one's self.

The worlds of *umnart* and *khuna* are not understood as in opposition; they are blended in the Thai world view as complementary contradictions. While Buddhism deals with the world inside oneself, the *saksit* rituals deal with the world outside. The division of the world is between the inside and the outside. Order is not the victory of the Buddhist inside over the chaotic outside; it is not a question of Buddhist science or philosophy prevailing over an

animistic prior world. The contradictions that exist are part of the world; not to be resolved logically but to be kept in balance. Death, the ultimate force that threatens or embodies chaos, is not a thing but a transitional space or distance, a process which is interpersonal, not ideational. Like power, death has no "cause" as it is a *saksit* force. There is no moral aspect to death. Such power cannot be controlled or explained away (demythologized).

In *Keys to Natural Truth* (1988), Buddhadasa Bhikkhu considers the types of language we need to understand the world and *dharma*:

> Everyday language is based on physical things, and on experience accessible to the ordinary person. Being based on the physical rather than the spiritual, it serves only for discussion of physical, worldly matters and situations. It serves only for the tangible things perceived under ordinary everyday circumstances. By contrast, Dhamma language has to do with the mental world, with the intangible, non-physical world. (1988: 16)

While Bhikkhu does not explicitly say that the physical world is the world of *saksit* and that the Dharma language is for the *khuna*, the Thai view of the physical world as *saksit*, which is echoed in the Buddhist view of the world of *dukkha*, parallels this contradiction.

There is a bilingualism in the approach used by Bhikkhu which stems from the Pali language used by Thai Buddhism and the Thai language rooted in an older Tai language used in the everyday world. But it would be wrong to see the two languages as totally separate from each other. What makes the Thai language of death so rich is the roots of many Thai everyday words in the Pali Buddhist texts, the *Tripitaka*. By speaking everyday Thai, one is often unconsciously using words with a Tai husk and a Pali kernel. In other words, the Thai language is a blend of the everyday and the spiritual, the animistic and the Buddhist.

It would be too hasty a demythologization to separate the two by suggesting that the *saksit*, animistic meanings are the mythical while the Buddhist meanings are the logical and that the task is to decide which meaning is to be used. Such a monochronic solution is un-Thai. There is no either-or choice here, but rather a "both". If this is the case, then we must avoid seeing the issue of the language of death, our specific focus here, in terms of monochronic structural stages between superstition and science, primitive logic / science and modern science, as Levi-Strauss (1962: 16–22) sees the relationship between myth and reason. In the Thai world, the contradictions exist and are unresolvable. Both worlds exist together, side by side, polysynchronically.

For Bhikkhu, we should be speaking both languages by referring to a sutta from the *Summyatta nikaya*:

> It is essential always to interpret the Buddha's teaching in terms of Dhamma language as well as in terms of everyday language. Both meanings must be considered. Please take careful note of the following passages:
>
> *Appamatto ubho atthe adhiganhati pandito*
> *Ditthi dhamma ca yo attho, yo ca'ttho samparayuko*
> *Atthabhisamayadhiro pandito ti pavuccati*
>
> The wise and heedful person is familiar with both modes of speaking; the meaning seen by ordinary people and the meaning which they can't understand. One who is fluent in the various modes of speaking is a wise person. (1988: 17)

Bhikkhu stresses the importance of not choosing one meaning at the expense of the other: "A discerning person must consider both meanings or modes of speaking and not just one of them alone." (1988: 17)

In a sense, this double meaning, or double voice, is a form of yoga, understood as yoking things together. In this sense, there is a metaphorical organization of meaning. This is a specifically Buddhist approach to language, semantics, voice and poetics. When we place this linguistics in the context of the Thai world view discussed above, it may be suggested that the Thai view of the two contradictory worlds of *saksit* and *khuna* are built into the Thai language. In colloquial Thai, death (*die*) is a physical thing, but in Buddhism death is *dukkha* which comes from being trapped in the false binary opposition of ordinary semantic sense when we recognize good and evil:

> When there is no knowledge of good and evil, we can't attach to them, we're void and free of *dukkha*. Once we know about good and evil, we attach to them and must suffer *dukkha*. The fruit of that tree is this attachment to good and evil. This causes *dukkha* and *dukkha* is death, spiritual death. (1962: 101)

The Pali voice in Thai language is heard alongside the voice of the everyday words. They are inside each other. As a result, there remains a mythic presence, an ambiguity of voices which embodies this dialectical contradiction.

Without going into the implications this dialectic has for teaching English in Thailand in detail (see Conlon 2009 for a discussion of this issue) the Thai approach to language is pertinent to the study of the work of Sudham as he writes his novels in a foreign language, English. The point in this essay is to stress that if one is to understand the approach to death embodied in Sudham's language, one needs to reconsider many of the ideas we in the West associate with *mythoi* and *logoi* in order not to impose Western post-Enlightenment divisions which demand a choice between the two languages of *saksit* and *khunna*, or between Pali and Thai or Thai and English. In Sudham's writings, there is the double voice of Lao and Thai which is related to the identification of the relationship between Prem the Esarn child and the country of Thailand under the shadow of which the land of Esarn is exploited. These issues are related to another theme in Sudham's work: exile. Sudham's hero Prem experiences the animistic world of Esarn and the Buddhist world of the *wat* (temple) in which he is schooled in Bangkok. He does not choose one over the other.

Instead of René Gerard's (1988) demythologization of death as a sacrifice ritual which works to protect the victim, and instead of Levi-Strauss's view of death myths as taboos that classify the physical world, a more sympathetic approach to the ways a Thai may see the rituals of death is Ernst Cassirer's:

> The original bond between the linguistic and the mythico-religious consciousness is primarily expressed in the fact that all verbal structures appear as also mythical entities, endowed with certain powers, that the Word, in fact, becomes a sort of primary force, in which all being and doing originate. (*Language and Myth*: 44–45)

Cassirer locates this nexus of mythical thought and verbal thought in the power of metaphorical thinking (84). This needs to be expanded when discussing the double voice of Thai language in *Shadowed Country*.

Whenever language has been used or changed, there is an implicit double mind at work. In the world of orality and myth, before language was written down, two or more people talked to each other in dialogue. This interpersonal exchange has always been open to contradiction. There is implicit in the act or art of dialogue a schizophrenic doubleness which is natural, not a disease or psychological barrier. (See Ong 1982: 68 for a discussion of the split between internal and external voices. See also Bakhtin (1984) for the double voice and its relationship to the dialogical function of writing.) To communicate is to be in two minds; one's own and in the mind of one's interlocutor. Dialogue is the yoking together of two

minds or two world views. The discourse which embodies this dialogue holds both minds: that of the first person and the second person. It is not just two "I's" speaking. The dialogue partners are sharing their worlds, blending them. In this sense, all speech has a metaphorical organization. Unless the dialogue partners recognize this, they will not understand that what they are doing when they turn-take or code-switch is experiencing a form of linguistic death. In terms of the Buddhist approach, death occurs at every moment in one's experience, and this holds true for one's language too. To stop talking or thinking in language is to die. When one starts to talk again, one undergoes a birth.

At the heart of ritual and myth is the dialogue we make, with ourselves and each other. And that dialogue forms our narrative with a sense of an ending; we are talking in death and to death. In a way, language is a *saksit* ritual to control the chaos of an amoral world. But it is also a moral good (*khunna*) that allows us to move beyond the consciousness of death. The stories we tell to control death are *mythoi*. The telling of the story is a way to control death, to conquer it.

Karen Armstrong (2005: 1) suggests that our creation of myth comes from our fear of death; we tell stories to explain death, the forces that threaten us in the world we experience in nature. What she could have said to extend this point is that the shaman, the artist, and the philosopher as teacher do this as they embody death for us in their various linguistic rituals. By absorbing death into language, we create mimetically a world in which the chaos of nature is embodied in a form which can be communicated to others. At the root of language, this force remains. The rhetorical practices of speech, writing, logic and grammar are all rituals we employ to order our mythic mind and to yoke together the amoral world of nature and the moral world of culture. When we try to divorce these worlds into science and art, reason and myth, we do violence to language and hide the truth that it still embodies, at least for humanists such as Cassirer: language is a magical ritual we practice unconsciously from the depths of our mind which remains undivided, even though it is in a schizophrenic state which is neither good nor evil.

Patterns of Life and Death in the Textual Cycles of *Shadowed Country*

*Monsoon Country***,** the second part of *Shadowed Country*, opens with the hero Prem Surin's birth. The village *khamnan* or headman notes that the child's birth in the Year of the Horse is auspicious as *achanai* or *achanaya*, literary words for "horse" mean "intelligence or knowledge" (30). As a young child, Prem is withdrawn, almost autistic; he is silent and keeps

his eyes closed. He is given the nickname of Tadpole by his family, but others call him the Mute. The other children in the village say he is as mute as a tree or a buffalo. This name is inauspicious in Thai as to call a person a buffalo or kwai is considered to be the worst insult with connotations of extreme stupidity.

Prem's first word is "look" (*bueng*) when he points to rain clouds, "grotesque shadows", and sees that "rain was nigh" (36). In English the word "nigh" collocates heavily with the word "death" from the books of the Hebrew prophets and the Apocalypse of John. He is attracted by the beauty of the clouds as they changed "from form to form, shadow to shadow" (36). His sister Piang is upset as the wind rises when he utters his word and points. She thinks Prem has broken a taboo and tells Prem that he must not look at, listen to or speak about the "Power of Darkness" (37). But Prem has no fear of death (38). When he falls as he chases the village girls, as boys did in a primitive time (39), he starts to speak more, but his words are not in order.

It is not until he falls into a lotus pond, with its collocations to the Buddha, and is near death that his speech starts to flow. The seer Tatip Henkai is consulted and barters with the local "mother ghost" Pramae who adopts Prem and so saves his life from "the jaws of death" and makes his life bearable in the living hell of his "tormented" (45) life in the village in Isarn. Tatip sees that Prem is not one of the villagers, "not one of us" (42), and that he is an outcast (42) from the West. From this point, Prem starts to see himself inside Etan, his buffalo, and so sees with Etan's eye. What he sees is the corruption of the headman in the village which the other villagers refuse to recognize openly as they suffer from ignorance under the Power of Darkness (74). He is given another name, "Luke-pi" or child of the spirit or mother goddess. He also takes on the buffalo's power of "dumb endurance" (109). When his teacher Kumjai sends him to Krueng Thep (the Celestial City or the City of Angels in Thai known as Bangkok in English) he is given yet another name, Luke-sith or Temple Boy (110).

Away from Napo, Prem learns well, especially English, although he is punished at school and at university for asking his teachers questions. He is offered a scholarship to study in England. As he prepares for this third move in his life, he returns to Napo to take leave of his family. While there, Tatip Henkai, the village shaman, tells Prem "My end is nigh" (135).

The pattern established by Sudham in the narrative is to focus on those moments in Prem's life when he moves from one life to another. These are the *khwan* points in Thai life experience. (Others are becoming a monk, getting married, etc.) Physically, the *khwan* (747) is the soul or essence one has in the crown of the head. With each transition he gains a new

name. He learns that he has changed; he sees that man sheds his skin like a snake and takes on a new identity (95). He thinks to himself about this pattern of chaos as he debates whether to sit for the university entrance examinations:

> *Must I strive for higher learning? Prem pondered. It would be a pity to revert into the darkness after having done so well in the high school examinations. I have come this far. Alone, I boarded that train to come to the maze of this chaotic city. Now I am afraid of going further. I could not stop that train then as it took me away from my father and my teacher. The journey must continue.* (113–114)

To win a scholarship to England while he is at university, he has to distance himself from the 14th October 1973 Uprising. He is asked about his involvement by the scholarship board. He tells the board that he stayed at the Wat (Temple) to learn how to read a Pali script. But Sudham then enters Prem's mind as he answers the question and we see the language of the Mute is different to his appearance to the "Judge" as he "projected a look of being absolutely harmless" (125):

> *I wanted to rebel against every notion, every ounce of my blood that made me a Siamese, against the life of an obedient boy who had to behave, to be mindless and voiceless under the tyrannical suppression of the despots. On the other hand I am alive today because I have been obedient and because of my own lack of critical thinking and a political belief. Come with me, Rit said, and you will know what LIBERTY on an American coin means. But then Rit died along with hundreds of students, shot down by troops and tanks and helicopters.* (129)

Sudham has not narrated this uprising which occurred at an earlier time. Nor has he told the reader that Rit, Prem's best friend at the Wat, was killed. We learn these things at a distance, in Prem's memory as he is being interviewed for a scholarship to leave Siam.

This is the first time in the novel that we learn of the death of someone close to Prem. It is not narrated in chronological time and is heavily contextualized in terms of Prem's current position of being interviewed by the scholarship board. The emotion of anger is there, but not the sorrow for the loss of his friend. His external calmness is contrasted with the hot feelings he keeps inside. Much of this tension is a result of the fact that he was not with Rit when he was murdered by the soldiers.

This pattern of organization whereby the writer keeps back certain information in order to distance it from the reader is homologous to the way the writer reorganizes his fiction. The passages cited above are not in the earlier version of *Monsoon Country*. What we see is the new life of the story in Prem's mindfulness. We are given italicized interior monologues which stress the space between Prem's outside and inside worlds. This enters the new form of *Monsoon Country* when it is re-embodied in *Shadowed Country* where Prem is instructed in *Vipassana* by Pra Sungwian, the "venerable monk" who is his *ajarn* at the temple:

> Meditation or *Vipassana* is a form of mental culture to achieve mindfulness, clarity and knowledge. When you are mindful you know exactly what you are doing. You are mindful of your actions, your words, your thoughts and you see things clearly as they are. (115)

This mindfulness is represented by Sudham in Prem's increasing exposure to the reader through the interior monologues. Reading such passages after having read *Monsoon Country* in its earlier forms of life, the reader experiences a sense of the text being reborn as well as a sense that the earlier forms of the story were palimpsests under which the story now coming out to life were overwritten or submerged in the earlier lives of the text. This may be a form of the cycle of life and death that informs Sudham's narrative method or strategy. The patterns of birth and death are not linear constructs; they are only seen when later events occur that bring the past back to life in ways that enable the reader to see the proxemic closeness of events from a Thai cultural perspective. Meaning or significance is generated through the repetition of the cycle, not by the chronologically linear development of a cause and effect pattern. The reader learns of things only when they become significant to Prem as he goes on his *Vipisanna* quest-journey for liberation through knowledge. Things that seem isolated in mundane time take on both *saksit* and *khuna* significance when they are experienced later under the impact of *The Force of Karma*. In the interview with the scholarship board, we see the student protest, the death of Rit and Prem's change of life being yoked together: they give each other meaning by their proxemic relationship in Prem's mindful state (*Samadhi*) during the interior monologue he experiences at the interview. We see why he is doing the things he does when he wants to leave the chaos of the city and the darkness of the shadow of Siam for England.

Prem's last meeting with the shaman Tatip represents the end of a cycle of twelve years from the time Tatip became his spiritual father by dedicating his new life to the Mother Goddess. The next time Tatip comes into the story is now, when he is dying as Prem is preparing to leave Napo, Isarn and Siam.

When he returns to Napo, Prem learns of his teacher Kumjai's fate as he has been driven out of the village and his school has been destroyed by his ex-students who accused him of being a communist. Prem is "drowning in a sea of pain" (131) when he learns of these events. What we as readers do not know yet, and will not learn for hundreds of pages, is that these events occurred as a result of the student uprising too. In his interior monologue, Prem addresses Kumjai in the second person:

> *Teacher, teacher, you should be careful in giving out books to your students, and you should never tell anyone that they must try to reach for the light. Words cannot be eaten.* (133)

But he closes his monologue by talking of Kumjai in the third person:

> *Remember, it's a sacrifice you're making, he once wrote. Could it be that he would be arming himself with truth, to speak truthfully on our behalf without fear? LIBERTY is a foreign word found on a coin a good-looking American man dropped in the palm of my hand, an irony coming from a free land to remind me that I have been living in fear under a despotic regime that Siam has had for decades. But it is the death of Rit, a fair boy from Chiangrai, and the disappearance of Kroo Kumjai that have made me understand fully the meaning of LIBERTY.* (135)

Three Characters

This essay will look at the deaths of three male characters in *Shadowed Country*, each of whom seems to be offered as a type of authority or power figure: Tatip the shaman, Regnitz the artist, and Kumjai the teacher. All three of these characters function as surrogate father figures who play significant roles in Prem's life and his learning processes. The biological father, the taciturn Kum, has little to do to help his son. How and why these three surrogate figures die seem to form a pattern in the narrative which points towards a repressed theme that may be unfolded in subsequent (expanded) iterations of the novel which seem to be linked to a grail-like ethos revolving around the Fisher King's wound and the wasteland he

reigns over. The complications evoked by the pattern of death revolving around only male characters who remain pure and die in moments that confirm their power are refracted through another theme; that of homosexuality and its attendant recognition of the Thai patriarchal social structure which must be left for a subsequent political discussion of Sudham's work.

Mothers, wives and lovers survive their men folk. The only female character who faces death is Prem's lover Lizzy, who disappears from the narrative only to re-emerge as a D.E.A. agent who had to be spirited out of Thailand in the aftermath of a drugs operation in Pattaya. Her disappearance is also complex, coming as it does in terms of references to *Wuthering Heights* where Catherine and Heathcliff's romance is represented in part in terms of absence and reunion on a spiritual level. This level of intertextuality will also have to wait for a subsequent discussion of Sudham's Romantic vision.

The Death of the Shaman

The monologue addressed to his teacher segues into Prem's last meeting with the shaman Tatip which occurs the day before he leaves Napo. The death of his only friend Rit and the fate of his teacher Kumjai are proxemically related to this meeting in terms of the textual space and time and the thematic significance of the three as a group in Prem's life. This meeting represents the end of a cycle of twelve years from the time Tatip became his spiritual father by dedicating Prem's new life to the Mother Goddess. The next time Tatip comes into the story is now, when he is dying as Prem is preparing to leave Napo, Isarn and Siam.

Tatip's first words to Prem at their last meeting are stammered out: "Very goo..good of you to co..come to say goo..goodbye to me, 'luke-pi'" (135). While these words may be the expected speech pattern of a man in pain as he dies, they take on another meaning for a reader of *Monsoon Country* (1993) where Prem is the one who stammers until he falls into the pond. This speech has been passed onto Tatip in this scene which has been unfolded or added in the *Monsoon Country* part of *Shadowed Country*.

Tatip sees Prem's *premae* hovering over him and observes, "She is looking kindly at me now, knowing tha..that my end is nigh." (135) The *pramae* was not with Prem in Bangkok; she is only with him when he returns to the zone of her protection in Napo. Tatip's echo of Prem's thought that the "rain was nigh" (35) collocates the words "rain" and "end" (death).

The reaction of the teenager who has been caring for the dying Tatip is significant; he wants to leave Prem and Tatip at the mention of the spirit and death. He does this by observing the Thai proxemic rule of *gom hua* by bending himself as he passes between them so that his head is lower than theirs' as a sign of respect for invading the space between them. When he has moved three yards away, he stands to jump away: "he fled from *pramae*'s vision" (136) to "confirm the tale of the *luke-pi*" (136) passed on by his father to him when he was younger.

Alone with Tatip, Prem feels the juxtaposition of their two visions: "the 20th century scholar who had been striving steadily forwards towards the light, succumbed to the lure of ancient mystique" (136). Apart from the sense of movement and direction in Prem's thought processes, there is the attraction (lure) of the ancient wisdom. Despite his education at university, Prem still feels that it is possible to move between the light (with its connotations of enlightenment) and the darker side, as connoted by the word "mystique". There is a sense of privacy mixed with shame in Prem at this point: "But before asking the impinging question, he turned to look over both shoulders to see whether there was anyone listening." (136) It is his bodily reaction which communicates his wavering intentions. The question that is said to be "impinging" is given a sense of proxemic movement too. The reader is not prepared for this question; it remains in Prem's mind. Like the teenager who has moved out of the personal space between Tatip and Prem moments before, Prem senses that he must also make a physical gesture recognizing that his question too will impinge on Tatip's space in the form of a verbal *gom hua* which is linked to the Thai concept of *griengjai* (an unwillingness to inconvenience a person with higher status).

The pattern of physical distance between the two has been established already in this meeting: Prem "seemed to be glowing with an aura of health and holiness", "in contrast to the dying" (136). Prem's voice is clear and exact in its pronunciation of the Lao language while Tatip's "wavering voice trailed off in the dark cavern of time" (136). The juxtaposition of life and death felt by Prem is contextualized in the series of contrasts between age and youth, confident and wavering voices, reason and superstition, the present and the past. The distances evoked by these juxtapositions creates a sense of the malleable space between the two men in which Prem can move from the one life to the other. The duality in this is suggested by his looking over both his shoulders when he makes sure that no one else is impinging on their conversation.

When he finally asks his "impinging question", there is no concrete context for it: "What else could you see, Grandpa?" (136). Time, both narrative and chronological, is

breached by the question as Prem refers back several years and nearly ninety pages of the novel to when Tatip tells him of his vision regarding Prem's past life. Time for both men is polysynchronic. And the reader is meant to understand the context without any scaffolding being supplied by Sudham. Tatip tells Prem "I've almost forgotten now. It's so . . . so long ago since I had a look" (137). Prem nervously fidgets, looks around behind him again, and asks Tatip to look again. He knows that Tatip is dying, but wants to know what he sees. Tatip resists this at first:

> The weary soul and the youth locked eyes to test each other's inner strength. Under the glare of Prem's piercing pupils, the dying man yielded. (137)

The violence of the space between them is registered in the proxemic language ("locked eyes" as in a battle, "strength", "glare", piercing" and "yielded"). The sense of a grail-like contest of strength, as in a rite of passage, is strengthened by what Tatip then does as he prepares to look back at Prem's previous life. He "cupped" his hands "to symbolize a blossoming lotus flower" (137), thus suggesting not only "a votive offering in worshipping the Spirits of the Universe" (the animistic *saksit* powers that surround him in the village), but the legends of Buddha sitting on the lotus leaf in a pond and Prem's falling into a lotus pond which led to Tatip's intervention in his life ninety pages and twelve years before. Prem's heart thumped to the tempo of Tatip's voice "chanting" of the magical mantra, while Tatip's lips "moved as if his life was ebbing away." (137) Here, the *saksit* and the Buddhist elements are blended or flow together, as is suggested by the water imagery of "pond" and "ebbing". Tatip forsees the end of the novel when he tells of how Prem will again meet some of those involved with his previous life in England and how he will live in his "grand old house" again, after he has "done go . . . good deeds to compensate for the bad *karma*" (138). As soon as he says this, he announces "now I must go" (138). Tatip dies in the middle of blessing Prem: "May *pramae*, your sacred mother goddess pro . . . protect you always . . ." (138).

We then see Prem preparing the body and to tell the relatives of what has happened:

> Luke-pi closed the dilated eyes and the gaping mouth. Then he drew an old blanket over the body before leaving the hut. Having climbed down the ladder, he looked for the relatives of the dead to give them sad news. (138)

Not "the dead man" or "the dead seer"; Tatip's corpse is no longer that of a person. This is a Thai view of the dead, full stop. The generalized and almost euphemistic space left says

much about this view of a dead person. This distance is prolonged in the next sentence when Prem "delayed his departure from Napo two more days in order to attend the funeral" (138). Again, not "Tatip's funeral" or "the funeral of the dead man"; just "the funeral". The pattern in this death scene is one of absence, of words left out, of the empty spaces of language. We do not see any tears or sorrow in Prem. The news is "sad", not Prem. Death is part of the cycle which Prem has just had an intense experience of with Tatip. His words are reported, not direct; we are not shown him telling the relatives of Tatip's death: the death of his "grandpa" is distanced from us, as it is distanced from Prem. While this tone of silence is appropriate given the ritualistic circumstances of the scene, there is no awe or grief in Prem. He sees death in a different, Thai, way—as the completion of the ritual Tatip has just performed for him that links Prem's past and future to the seer's death vision. The *khwan* time of transition in which Prem leaves the village for England, is ritualistically marked by the ceremony of "the funeral" as such, not "Tatip's funeral". There is no sense of finality or ending. Instead, Tatip says that he must "go" with the implication that he is entering the next stage in the cycle of karma. Sudham feels no need to depict the funeral in detail. He implies that the funeral is not special as it occurs in less than three days after Tatip's death. In Thai culture, at least three days are required for the ceremony, with a week being more common. The higher the status the dead person had in life, the longer the funeral rites. The short time frame here suggests that Tatip was not regarded as an exceptional person in the village. His function as seer is not experienced by any of the villagers as awesome or noble. His role as the village shaman is a matter of fact, a mundane thing.

On a deeper level of culture, the representation of Tatip's funeral would be irrelevant as the only thing left at a Thai funeral is the body of the dead; the mind has already left the body; it is not there to witness the funeral of its body. As a Thai, Prem would not consider it possible to talk to Tatip after he has died in the way Western people sometimes address the dead as if they were still present. In a similar way, neither Tatip nor Prem consider the possibility of Tatip talking to the Marquess of Wealdon, Prem's former embodiment. The spirit of the Marquess is already in Prem's body. It is no longer part of the body that was the Marquess.

Death of the Artist

The death of the shaman Tatip marks a transition phase in the narrative: Prem leaves for Europe where he finds a new life when meets Dani Pilakol, a research fellow at the London

School of Economics. Through Dani, Prem is invited to Germany where he meets the composer Helmut von Regnitz. The invitation comes at an auspicious time, when Prem (whose name means joy in Thai) is listening to the last movement of Beethoven's ninth symphony, the libretto of which is Schiller's "Ode to Joy". These details have been added since the 1993 edition of *Monsoon Country*. The invitation arrives at a nadir in Prem's writing attempts:

> He wanted to be able to give Toon [his childhood sweetheart] a poem to celebrate her beauty and to uplift her weary heart from drudgery. He wished to remark on simple things that were beautiful and to give a few ballads and songs to a band of buffalo boys so that they could sing to praise the magical monsoon. Now he held a lot of conflicting ideas and had not been able to create those songs except bitter words in a foreign language to celebrate nothing but the pain and despair in the heart.
>
> Yes, it would be difficult now to go back to the desk to face that piece of paper on which idealistic words had been arrogantly written. What could one do with the mumbo-jumbo of words passed off as verse? (176–177)

His poetry seems distant and empty to him; an idealistic and arrogant fraud.

The narration of the episode at Heeringen where Prem witnesses the death of the composer Helmut is the most extensive one in the novel (177–214). It represents the first major crucible or watershed of Prem's art where he is involved in the death of the artist Regnitz. With the composer's son, Danny leaves his adopted foster father, Helmut, for a skiing holiday and asks Prem to look after the sick composer. (Note the changed spelling of the name suggesting corporeal impermanence, at least in the English language / Latin script. This fluidity of the body is also sounded in Prem's reference to Tatip as his grandfather quoted above in this essay.) Here a parallel is set up between Prem's relationship with Tatip, his spiritual grandfather and Danny's relationship with Helmut.

In *Shadowed Country*, unlike in *Monsoon Country* (1993), Prem arrives in Germany as Luke-pi and as "the son of the mother goddess" (178). It "dawns on him" that Dani / Danny (Dhani, a more orthodox Thai spelling, in the 1993 version) "could be a *farang* in the guise of a Siamese" (179). There is more modality in the 2003 version compared to Prem's 1993 observation that "Dhani was in fact a *farang* in the guise of a Siamese" (1993: 169).

Without making an exhaustive comparison of the many changes of words between the two versions of the episode, the point to be made is that Sudham sees his words as malleable,

changeable, in a state of flux. While the death of Tatip is a new episode added in a macro way to *Shadowed Country*, the death of Regnitz is carried on from the earlier version and changed internally or in a more micro manner. By adding details about Prem's spirit life in Napo, Sudham is stressing the relationship between the two deaths.

There is a formal, ritualistic atmosphere in the composer's house. Prem celebrates Gemütlich, a "rite of Christmas" (179), with Danny and the composer's son before Helmut, in a candlelit room:

> A few minutes later, Herr Helmut von Regnitz made an appearance. Because the father moved rather slowly through the dark passages of his great house, the three young men did not see or hear him until he was ready to sit down with them. (179)

Helmut's ghostly appearance is stressed: "His eyes had deepened in their sockets; however, there was a sign of life in them as they flickered against the dancing candlelight" (179). After the rite of Christmas has been completed, Prem walks outside. Through a window, he sees a "perplexing scene" with Regnitz moving in his study:

> It was a movement of a man in pain, staggering and stumbling and falling. Coming closer to the window, the observer saw that the composer had lain on the bed gasping like a stranded fish. (180)

The other two young men prepare dinner, leaving Prem alone. He worries that the old man needs assistance:

> With such a care in mind, Luke-pi sat upright in the manner of meditation and channeled his thoughts into an intense beam at the image of Reinhard von Regnitz. And thus Reiner became aware of his father and went into the study. (181)

Danny asks Prem to "be an angel" (182) and look after the composer while the other two go skiing. In the morning, Prem meets what he guesses is the housekeeper who comes only occasionally and what he guesses is a doctor who checks on Regnitz. They do not recognize or respond to Prem. To get out of their way, he walks outside:

> He wandered from the track into the snow-laden forest, wanting to look for the mystery. One knew intimately the monsoon plains, the desiccation, the croaking of frogs and the humming of insects, but the strange shapes of leafless beech, elm, and

birch trees in the mist and the young spruces hiding under the snow had to be treated with awe. The secret and the exotic beauty lured him deep into the forest. (182)

When the composer does not come out for dinner, Prem decides that "*the silent night would be perfect for composing a song*". He sits in his room, listening to the "murmuring of the great house" (183) while the snow falls outside and his words too "were descending like the snow, flake by flake, word by word" (183). His song begins:

In an ancient room
foreclosed with doom
in monsoon country
I lay in disuse, in need of bravery
while vile portent and disaster
and lustrous laughter
of armed men and thieves
come with the rustling of leaves.
(183–184)

Here, he blends his immediate surroundings in Germany in the opening two lines with his memories of Esarn that follow. He sees himself as "weakened, / silenced and saddened" and in the "doldrums" (184). The song ends with "Manora's use of cunning / to regain her sequestered wings" (184), thus moving the narrative onto an explicitly mythic level of significance. Manora, one of the *kinarries* or winged goddesses or half-bird women who lived on Mount Meru, the centrepiece of the "Hindu-Buddhist cosmological model" surrounded by circles of oceans and continents (Jumsai: 12) from where the world was created. The three counter-clockwise moves around the pyre at a Thai funeral is the death cycle movement winding back up to Mount Meru. For Prem, her significance is that she was captured by a hunter who used a serpent to entwine her and was given as an "offering to the king" (184). As an alien, she is blamed for bringing "war, plague and economic crisis" (185) to the land. The courtiers tie her to a pyre and plan to sacrifice her to lift the curse. As part of her "last rite", she asks to wear her wings so that she can perform "the *kinarry*'s Dance of Death" (185).

In Prem's dream, Danny is led like Manora to a pyre. In a passion-like scene ("His skull was cracked, bleeding; his face was dripping with blood and his clothes were torn and

splattered with excrement") recorded in poetry in the dream, the men who want to make Danny the scapegoat yell:

> Burn him, the alien who is dangerous,
> becoming grossly prosperous;
> and yet his heart is bent upon destroying,
> guise and bribes employing!
> He is a dead weight on the land!
> Such a man cannot live in our land! (185)

All of this mythologizing about Danny is new to *Shadowed Country*. The "fiends" "pierced his heart with a sharp stake" (vampire-like), douse him with petrol, and hang him as he burns. In his prophetic buffalo eye of Etan, Prem sees Danny's "soul rise with the flames and smoke" (186). The call of Danny's soul makes him weep in the dream. When he awakes from the dream, he is still weeping. This shocks him, as he asks "Was his despair so refined now that he could cry only in dreams?" This question highlights the point that this is the only time Prem weeps for the dead in the novel. He regrets his inability "to reason, to question, to discuss, to make a critical appraisal. Like a Strasbourg goose, he had been force-fed with rote-learning" (186). He does not know what to make of this experience; he is perplexed by it. He cries at the prophesied death of his brother-like friend Danny, but not at Tatip's death. The impact of the mythic extension on Prem's psyche traumatically generates his looking at himself as a sacrificial bird too. Unlike Danny, whose sacrifice is bodily, Prem sees his own mind as the victim sacrificed by the Thai education system. This too is new to *Shadowed Country*. He looks at two passages of his own writing, one in Thai and the other in English and sees the proxemic space between them as a reflection of his maimed mind:

> But now writing in English translated from the Siamese original draft, he could see the obvious contrast of the two languages placed side by side. *As opposed to English, Siamese has no punctuation marks, no capital letters, no sentences*, Primo pondered, glancing at the pages of the two written languages. *Siamese words are strung tightly together. At times one can say or write at the beginning without a noun. Such an omission relies on guesswork to be understood, whereas in English a sentence has a beginning and an end, the noun and the verb, or the verbs and a full stop. It must not rely on guessing or convoluted speculation. Each word is individual, with spaces in between. Yes, each word is individualistic, just like each of the farangs who have their*

> *own minds, their own opinions and their own mental spaces. Siamese words can be tightly knitted together into lines without breathing space unless one wants to make a gap at any chosen spot, just like most Siamese who are extremely gregarious, adoring 'togetherness' in what they do. If one seeks to be an individual, to be alone, to read alone, or even to think, it is considered an anomaly. How language reflects the minds of the peoples! Now I understand why Danny often taunted me with: 'Don't say it in that muddled, wailing and weakly way. The voice of the maimed mind makes me cringe! Say it in English; its grammatical order and discipline will certainly reform and reorganize your mind, believe me.'* (186–187)

In this passage, the epithet characterizing Prem is "Primo", Danny's nickname for him; he thinks in character, as he always does, depending on the epithet he is named by. His personality is fluid and in flux all the time. As "the monsoon man" (187), Prem smiles at the look of English written in a Thai way without punctuation or capitalization. As he shifts from one personality or persona to another, his mood changes. His old self dies and a new self takes over temporarily. His breakthrough regards the proxemic qualities of the two languages which he sees in terms remarkably similar to Geert Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions of power distance, individual versus the collective, uncertainty avoidance and masculine versus feminine tone of voice. In a moment of insight, he now understands "what it was like to go from one empty room to another, to be left alone without feeling lonely in this immense mansion surrounded by shivering leafless trees, isolated by snow" (187). The death references are unmistakable, as are the mythic tones of the grail story. He empathizes with Helmut, the dead fish, and learns to be alone without being lonely in the death season of winter surrounded by leafless trees in the forest. The mystery of the house, the grail castle, however, remains: "All the while the mystery remained in the room in which the recluse stayed" (187). Parzival-like, he sees things he does not understand or respond to. He is undergoing a mystical experience couched in the imagery of myth.

When Helmut opens the door to his secret chamber, Prem is surprised as he is caught in the foolish act of being a "peeping tom" spying through the key hole of the door. He is also surprised by Helmut's (with that name's medieval knightly connotations) changed appearance, dressed as a "grandee of the old world" (188). Prem asks himself "Whoever this awesome personage could be" (188). The composer has just completed his last work, a tone poem titled *Tod* (Death). Now Helmut is full of life, rejuvenated as a result of his

composition, to such an extent that Prem thinks of the previous vision he had of the composer moving painfully as like a "nightmare" (189).

Prem's reaction continues the suggestion or implication that he is undergoing a transformation or metamorphosis in this mansion:

> When the composer had been totally wrapped up in the creation called Death, being aware of it in every breath he inhaled and exhaled, it had become an old familiar name. But to the budding poet who had been trying to conjure up the shape and form of the romantic-sounding tone poem it was staggering to know that it could encompass such a morbid theme. (189–190)

To write about death, and one's own death at that, is morbid to the Siamese Prem. Like a grail knight, Prem stares at the composer who is standing in the doorway, a place of transition, in a state of "dumb amazement" (190). For Prem, the theme of a dying man "struggling with Death" makes death seem "tangible" (190). Such concreteness would be alien to the Siamese Buddhist Prem. As they sit together drinking wine in celebration of the tone poem's completion, Prem wishes he is "worthy of the event and that he would not ask silly questions and act clumsy and knock the glass over" (190). Again, the grail echoes are there: the glass / grail, the foolishness of the grail knight, the wish to be "worthy" of receiving the grail knowledge.

The initiation ceremony continues:

> "What did you want to know?" Helmut inquired, tilting his head slightly. (190)

Prem reverts to a speech pattern reminiscent of Tatip's dying speech pattern:

> Oh, ai... I wanted to... to... know what's in this room, to... to see if there were any photographs, books, albums, things of Danny's childhood. (191)

Prem's use of the word "childhood" stimulates the composer who is transformed, as in a trance, immediately back into another time and back to his tone poem which he now realizes cannot be completed:

> Helmut pursed his lips as if to commit to himself an understanding of his own. His eyes were out of focus and he murmured in German what could be understood as: *So it is childhood then, the recollection of it and the happy moments of his life, his*

> *memories of the loved ones. Death could not take control all the time; there must be moments when Death relaxes it grip. The transfiguration would be possible . . .* (190)

Prem "watched in amazement a peculiar expression on his host's face" (190). The epithet of "host" is only used in the novel in reference to Helmut; its Christian significance is another link with the grail—this time to the meal. When the composer excuses himself to change the ending of his tone poem, Prem thinks "morbidly":

> *Every time I open my big mouth, the English and the German shudder for fear at what might come out next.* (192)

He still does not understand the significance of what has just occurred; he has participated in Helmut's creation of *Death*. The atmosphere outside transforms into a Brontë-esque (Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is Prem's favourite book) objective correlative of his inner state of mind:

> [H]e saw how the day had deteriorated, now being threatened by a snowstorm. The eves moaned and whined, the whole mansion shook and shuddered. The trees swayed and swirled with the fury. The tempest was lashing everything in its path. Prem tried to put his mind in order by using the techniques of *Vipassana* learned and practiced in Wat Borombopit. (192)

He realizes that the people of Esarn are happier than he is now, as he must go through the trials and tests of "culture conflict" (192). He remembers Kumjai telling him that this trial was "a sacrifice he was to make, following a dream" (192). He now sees his mission is to pursue his dream of being a writer, not an academic. But he is immediately confronted by his awareness of the gap between himself and Helmut:

> He [Helmut] was gifted, much encouraged and fully supported by his parents and teachers to follow his training and career in music. Moreover, the society in which he belonged provided the stimulus and the impetus that worked positively for him, not against him, whereas thinking Siamese such as writer and thinker Jit Pumisak had to be killed. Far-sighted leader and educator Pridi Panomyong had to flee the country to die in exile in France. Intellectual and educator Puey Ungpakorn had to escape to England, where he died. And writer Khamsing Srinok had to take flight across the

> Maekong River to Lao and sought asylum in Sweden, only to return to make a pact with the devil that he would be silent to stay alive. (192–193)

The mythic quest theme is stressed by Prem's reference to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* when he asks how he can survive in such a society that will not tolerate artistic or intellectual freedom or criticism:

> What cloak or camouflage must the little hobbit Frodo-Primo use to disguise his efforts for survival and reaching his goal? (193)

Later that night, Helmut calls out for Prem to help him as he is now too sick to medicate himself. As he leaves the composer's room, he glances at "the disorder of the writing desk and the scattered papers on the floor". He decides to "keep the door ajar" to help his "host" (194) if needs be.

There is a space left in the novel marking a shift of scene; the tone changes with shorter sentences breaking up the information and making the scene more distant from the reader:

> Gradually the dawn made the outlines of the branches and snowy landscape visible. It was a bleak morning. Nothing moved; nothing broke the silence. At about ten o'clock the telephone rang. "Good morning," Primo answered calmly. "Sorry, I can't speak German. Can you speak English? Yes, he told me that you would drop in on us yesterday. Can you make it this morning? Please come as soon as you can and call his doctor for me too. Herr von Regnitz is dead." (194)

Regnitz dies in the hiatus of the narrative. Prem's response is cold on the telephone. While there are similarities to the way Tatip's death is described, there are differences which mark the changes Prem has undergone in this part of his quest:

> Before the outsiders could arrive, the little man put the house in order, then he covered the corpse with an eiderdown. Standing at the bedside, he looked sadly at the body. *It seems I have the knack of conveying death to people*, he feared. Then he touched Helmut's forehead and brushed the snow-white hair so that the dead would be presentable to the visitors.
>
> "Goodbye, old man," Primo whispered, and left the room. (194)

At first, Prem sees Regnitz's body like he sees Tatip's corpse: both are husks, devoid of any person or emotional tie. He recognizes the pattern of being the one who witnesses death, which he describes ambiguously as having the 'knack of conveying death to people". While he covers Tatip's body with an old blanket, he pulls an eiderdown over Regitz's body. He makes both men's corpses presentable to others. Things must look correct. The difference in the scene with Regnitz's corpse is that Prem looks "sadly" at Regnitz and talks to his body. We hear his thoughts as he is with the dead now. The death-scape of blank snow is linked to Regnitz's snow-white hair.

Sudham defamiliarizes the death scene by suppressing information which makes the reader respond to the strangeness of the words. He seemingly coldly makes coffee for the doctor and the conductor whose names we are not given, as in a romance. We assume that the conductor is the person Prem has informed about the death over the phone, in a distant way. He does not show any emotion, thus raising the doctor's suspicions:

> It was not only the foreigner's passive tone of voice that bothered the doctor, who fidgeted, but also the seemingly calm, inscrutable Oriental face that aroused his annoyance. (196)

Prem's *jai yen yen* manner, his cool appearance in the face of death, is culturally alien to the Germans. Prem sees that the composer's death "weighed heavily on all of them" (195). He thinks that he should speak first as it would "break the spell". We are still in the enchanted world of the grail-like story.

The gap Sudham creates in the text by not describing the last minutes of Regnitz's life leads to the trial by ordeal which follows for the rest of the chapter in the novel. There are repercussions to this death, unlike in the death of the shaman. In a scene reminiscent of Kafka's *The Trial*, Prem is interviewed by the police who are suspicious of his role in Regnitz's death. Prem's emotional detachment is the source of the police inspectors' suspicions. Alone in the interrogation room with the composer who has now introduced himself as Wilhelm Hagenbach, Prem hears Tatip's voice coming to his mind:

> At that moment the insignificant little monkey heard the ancient seer say: "You'd wince at the sight of those good-looking big men. They'd remind you of your former self, your tall and strong stature, your golden hair and blue eyes which were lost to you in this life." (198)

In this passage added to *Shadowed Country*, the links between the two deaths echo in a way that refers back to Prem's previous life as Wealdon. The three deaths are being spun together here where Prem has his first independent memory of his previous life in India that has been foreshadowed in the novel's prologue. At this stage of the trial, Prem is seeing with Etan's eye; he is using his supernatural powers to deal with the police who he recognizes as hostile (199). With his back up at the surliness of the interrogator, Prem makes another breakthrough:

> For the first time in his life, the buffalo boy wanted to express his defiance, to stand up against the authority. The nature of the wild beast in him surged, rearing its dangerous head and sharp horns. To use his own devices, allowing the eyes of Etan to glare and with the horns in readiness for an attack, he was in his own element. (199–200)

In this passage added in *Shadowed Country*, Prem's transformation into a wild beast suggests the mythic qualities he is drawing on to survive this ordeal and to buck at authority. He is the sacrificial animal fighting for survival in the ritual in which he refuses to be the victim.

In his interrogation, Prem adds more details about the death of Regnitz. For example, we learn that Regnitz explained why he was leaving his *Tod* unfinished: "How could I know Death for real until it comes to take me away. So I will leave it unfinished and when I lie dying, then I will know" (202). This passage, with its allusion to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, is new to *Shadowed Country*. Other details emerge in Prem's interrogation and subsequent conversation with Wilhelm: there is a suspicion that Prem assisted Regnitz's death because the composer was left handed and the injection that killed him was in his left arm; Prem worries that he will be accused of murder. These issues are problematically left open-ended in the novel. Prem's private knowledge is left secret, as part of an initiation ceremony or ritual perhaps. He senses Wilhelm is using him and plans to flee from Germany. In an echo from Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" ("'Away! Away!' Prem heard a cry": 212) Sudham is representing Prem responding to the death and its aftermath in terms of Western Romantic literary traditions of death. Other more distant allusions are to D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* with Gerald's suicide by walking into the snow and Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* with Adrian Leverkusen's pact with the Nazis / Mephistopheles for his gift as a composer. Prem is learning to think as a Westerner; he now feels sadness for the dead, though he had known Regnitz for only three days: "What a tragedy to die in the arms of a

stranger" (213), he laments. He contrasts Helmut's created (assisted) artistic death (a tragedy full of artistic allusions) with the ways of death in Napo:

> If Death could be made tangible, you would be tearing at it, protecting the old man from its approach. In Napo a *mohpifa* [witch doctor] would be throwing magic rice all over the room to ward off Death, but here you had nothing except bare hands and tears. (213)

The capitalization of death suggests its personification as much as it does its presence as an abstract concept. The lack of italicization in these words breaks the pattern of representing Prem's internalized thoughts in that way. It suggests that the writer Sudham is directly addressing Prem in the second person for the first time in the novel. The pattern is stressed by the next sentences in the passage which revert to italics to represent a character's inner thoughts. These thoughts end the chapter and the episode of a Western death scene:

> *My unguarded soul wants to fly free . . . to hover in the celestial dome of light . . . to soar upward, carried by the divine light. But beware, we must not go astray in this solitude . . . Oh, I am so weary from wandering. Could this possibly be death?*
>
> *Look! Death! Death is exactly what I have perceived for Tod. Look! Die Verklärung* . . . (213–214)

The weariness Prem (or Regnitz, if this passage is Prem's insight into the composer's mind or a memory of words actually spoken but suppressed in his police interrogation) feels in his spiritual wandering is viewed as a possible form of death. Real or actual death is perceived as the meaning of the tone poem *Tod*. The art is about the creative energy of death seen specifically in Romantic terms. The repeated allusion to Keats's ode which is reminiscent of the poet's pathetic attempt to fly "on the viewless wings of Poesy" strengthens this frame of reference which we are reminded of a few pages later when Prem tells Elizabeth, his lover, that he sees his relationship to her in terms of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* which her dismissal of leads him to silence her "as if the wandering soul of Emily Brontë might hear" (217). These Romantic layers suggest that Prem is seeing his experience through the eyes of Western artistic responses now. The last words in the chapter re-embody Richard Strauss's tone poem *Tod und Verklärung* (Death and Transformation). The lesson of this experience for Prem is that he is in a "twilight zone somewhere between two worlds". He addresses himself in his thoughts:

> *You see, while Lord Buddha preached detachment, the Europeans uphold involvement, desire and craving. One must crave to expand and produce, to make the world go round, so to speak.* (215)

Regnitz's craving for death and Prem's involvement in that death have released and transformed Prem's artistic powers. As a product of this experience, he writes *A Cantata*, "to give his German experience a form" (216), which wins first prize in a poetry competition and so is his first successful work of art: he has been transformed and has left behind his old life of failed poetry that he had tried to write up to the time of Regnitz's death. He has learned to exploit the space between the two worlds of the West and the East and between life and death as a creative force. There is life after death when that death is transformed in the romantic image of art. Prem has learned to embrace the "morbid" perspective that had repelled him up to the time he became involved with Regnitz. His seemingly innocent question about childhood which inspired Regnitz to leave his tone poem unfinished and to see that Death could be transformed in the memory of previous episodes or forms of life and so could transform one's whole life into a work of art seems to be an underground stream back to the Prologue of *Shadowed Country* with its echoes of Shakespeare and Proust. It also seems to voice Sudham's own artistic vision in the novel. Later, Prem apparently uses his own childhood when writing *Monsoon People*, much as Sudham did when he wrote *Monsoon Country*.

In this central passage to the novel, Sudham seems to be creating a palimpsest by writing over the original text another text; the artistic process works by adding layers of experience to enrich that experience and so transform the dead or old text. The text that remains concealed, and which may yet be revealed in a future life of *Shadowed Country* has much to do with the vaguely hinted at grail motif as much as it may relate to Prem's physical actions of involvement at the time of the artist's death which gives him life as an artist. The esoteric ritual that may have been enacted in Regnitz's workshop remains a mystery and is a source of the deliberate romantic ambiguities Sudham is able to give to his work which still seems to exist in a "twilight zone" between fact and fiction, between the East and the West. Instead of Manora being Dani, it may be that Prem is the one who flies away at the moment of ritual death by means of a trick, albeit it an artistic one.

The background to this possibility of art as a way of surviving has been hinted at in Prem's remembrance of the novelists, social critics and thinkers who had been chased out of Thailand for daring to think for themselves. The exile of the scapegoat is the only way to

avoid physical or intellectual death. Any action by an intellectual to remedy the maimed mind of the Thai is met with by the threat of a violent death. When Prem returns to London, he learns of the violent suppression of the 1976 protests in Thailand. Danny's refusal to care about the deaths of the protesters leads Prem to break with him through violence when he punches him in anger, thus breaking the Buddha's rules. He has yet to learn how to deal with the death of the teacher or political death.

The Death of the Teacher

Kumjai, whose name incorporates the name of Prem's actual father (Kum) and the Thai word *jai* (which means both "heart" and "mind") is the teacher who awakens Prem's thirst for knowledge in the village school. As an activist teacher, he wants his pupils to think for themselves and is hampered in this by the Thai education system that he is a part of. He wants to empower the villagers to take control of their environment and end the corruption that is destroying their land. He sees the "Power of Darkness" (74) as the ignorance of the peasants who do not think critically of their power relations with their exploiters. This is one of the manifestations of the shadowed quality of the novel's title. As an agent of change, Kumjai uses his position of authority to lead the peasants in protests against their exploitation. He has a dream vision of the future from which he awakes to see that:

> *Change is inevitable and the agents of change could come in many forms, visible and invisible. Sometimes they arrive with a young man or woman wearing jeans, after having been in the Celestial City, or with a movie van, with plastic utensils and plastic bags, and sometimes with guns and grenades—the brutal change.* (88)

He decides to do something about making his students aware of the power of change by sending Prem to school in the Celestial City (Krueng Thep or the City of Angels, known in the West as Bangkok) (89). In doing this, Kumjai sets in motion a train of events which will shape much of Prem's life. The power of his being a student is a moral one which comes from the reality that the *crue* or *ajarn* (teacher) in Thai culture often has more moral authority over the child than does the parent.

Kumjai's vision and subsequent decision to save Prem comes immediately after the village bully and his gang had torn up the book of poems given to Prem by Kumjai as a prize for writing his own poem. This destruction of the book is described as a "ritual" (83) as

though it marks his move back from an educated way to the way of the past, the cyclical life of suffering as a peasant:

> Under the roof of the school he had had a chance to learn from the rote learning system for which the teacher had been trained. But on the barren plain, in the wilderness, the primeval forces became paramount. When he finished Pathom Four, he said goodbye to the school. Now he had to enter another life—that of a reckless youth destined to follow the path of peasantry ruled by thieves, scarcity, superstition, floods, drought, sickness, poverty, exploitation and injustice to which his father and his forefathers before him had been subjected. (79)

Prem gathers the pages as though they were "precious stones" (83) just before Kumjai rescues him from the gang. These stones adumbrate the "David Stones" (668) or stories Prem gathers to use against Goliath-like Philistine corruption he struggles against in his adult life as a writer; his five stories that expose the corruption of the shadowed country which he uses to kill the "Dark Lord" of ignorance, the origin of corruption.

It seems to be a deliberate choice by Sudham to frame the teacher Kumjai's experience in a blend of the spirit powers of Tatip the shaman and Regnitz the artist in representing Kumjai's dream-vision. The (Hegelian) *Bildungsroman* characteristics of the novel point towards the role of the writer as much as the experience of its central character as educators. At the end of the novel, Prem becomes a teacher who, to finish his karmic cycle, encourages his students to express their own opinions and to have a voice in the school he has decided to build in the village "as a monument to the murdered teachers" (745) who had raised their voices against the violence and corruption. The lesson of allowing students to speak and interact with their teacher was learned while he studied literature at university. His university tutor, Michael Wilding (Michael Wild in *The Force of Karma* 2002 life of the text), had encouraged him to express his own opinions about Milton's *Paradise Lost* as long as he could support his views with evidence and logic (622–623). As soon as he has learned this lesson, he learns of Kumjai's death back in Esarn (623). The choice of the breakthrough text is appropriate; he had decided earlier in his life that he would not serve or rebel against the Dark Lord (231); the lesson Milton seems to suggest in his poem.

At first, Kumjai's death, which takes up only one sentence in the text at this point, seems distanced and downplayed. Unlike with the deaths of Tatip and Regnitz, Prem was not there to witness his teacher's murder. Charles Tregonning, one of Prem's friends, keeps a

journal in which we learn of the deaths of ten other teachers who had raised their voices against the exploitation of the peasants (631–632). This journal re-embodies an essay from an edition of *Tales of Thailand* in its 2002 shape. Teachers in rural Esarn do face the threat of death whenever they decide to teach in an ethical way. This point is reinforced by the death of the teacher in other Thai novelists' work, such as in Khamman Khonkhai's *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* (1978) where the teacher Piya is accused of being a Communist to silence his protests against the exploitation of the villagers (1978: 292) and is shot by a hired gunman. That novel ends:

> Piya had no thought of danger, suspected nothing. His thoughts were only on the school, on his pupils, and on Duangdaw. He rode through the village and had started the ascent to the school when there was the crack of an old World War II rifle. Just one shot. The bullet plowed into the young teacher's chest and through his body. His body was thrown back and off his bicycle, Ai Krong, and he lay still on the ground, blood gushing.
>
> Duangdaw shrieked as she jumped at the sound of the rifle, as if she knew what had happened. The children streamed out, running one after the other, children and teacher dreading what they should find, heedless of danger to themselves.
>
> 'Khun Piya! You're gone from me!' Duangdaw hugged the corpse to her, not caring who saw. The others stood, completely silent as if hypnotized. At last Caw Siang spoke.
>
> 'Khru Piya is dead. Who is going to teach us now?'
>
> 'I am here. I'll be here with you always.'
>
> The young woman cradled the body, now bereft of consciousness, as a little girl would cradle a beloved doll. She sat there surrounded by children who could not understand why someone like Khru Piya should be shot and killed. (1978: 302)

This emotion-filled pathetic climax is ambiguously charged. The gunman is not caught and the children are left with no explanation of why the assassination of such a good person, an ethical teacher, has taken place. Yet there is hope: an unidentified voice promises that the speaker will always be there to teach the children. While the speech format with its implicit

cataphoric reference to the words that follow the recorded statement suggests that this is Piya's beloved Duangdaw speaking, it could also be the spirit of the dead teacher speaking through her or the voice of the novelist who is clearly identifying with the dead teacher's fate at this point. The cycle of death and life is here with the cradling of the dead body and the focus on the young children who are witnessing the end of the novel; but this cycle is not reinforced by the Thai world view, which has not been foregrounded in the novel. The novelist Khonkhai himself explained in his preface to the seventh printing of the novel that his aim was only to describe the causes of problems:

> I have only tried to set out those conditions which create problems in our society so that the members of society may recognize and understand them. I have no answers to these problems. (1978: xiii)

He later left teaching and was promoted to the position of Deputy Secretary-General of the Teachers Council of Thailand as a part of the Thai Ministry of Education (xiv).

Sudham's representation of the death of the teacher is more clearly Thai and so is more complex for a Western reader. Prem is researching the deaths of those who had returned to the village as he plans to write stories about them and so turn their deaths into art. We learn that he is writing the death of Mana from AIDS as a story about a female impersonator for his book *Tales of Siam* which is actually "The Impersonator: A 'kratoey' speaks" in *Tales of Thailand* (2002: 97–101).

The segue to the next paragraph may be awkward or not cohesive to a Western reader, but it seems to be deliberately so—Sudham keeps back Prem's reasons for making the scene which gives Charles cause to question the appropriateness of his intentions:

> Meanwhile, a re-enactment of the killing of Kumjai must be staged. When Charles heard of it, he remonstrated, "It's rather ghoulish, isn't it? Don't do it." Yet the wilful writer determined to go ahead with the plan. (667)

The reader is given the plan after it has been made. Prem's thinking out the plan is not represented in the text. The ensuing scene may look like a ghoulish farce that is intended to distance the reader from any emotional attachment to the description of the death. In this way, Sudham seems to distance himself from the *nam nao* ("black water" or soap opera) quality of the Khonkhai ending quoted above. The grammar of the segue is peculiarly Thai with the first word ('Meanwhile") seemingly a literal translation of *nai khana tee* or *rawang*

tee. As a time adverbial, "meanwhile" often seems out of place when used by Thais in their written English. But when the polysynchronic aspects of Thai time are understood, the vagueness of the word hints at a relationship between the two deaths in the text. Kumjai's death will also be absorbed in Prem's book of stories as a story titled "The Gunman" (2005: 668. See *Tales of Thailand*: 80–85 for the story subtitled with a Buddhist frame as "Ignorance is a source of suffering").

The dramatization of the killing is foregrounded, pushing the emotional impact of the death back away from the reader and from Prem:

> For this [re-enactment], he sought help from Anucha to act as Kumjai. That fatal day the headmaster was leading his pupils from the school building along the ridge of the Mongkol Pond towards the village street to make a protest at the District Office against the Department of Forestry's grant to a concessionaire to turn Chanlaiwood into a eucalyptus plantation. Where the hired gunman had awaited him, Prem stood askance in readiness to pull an imaginary trigger. (667)

As the new headmaster who replaced Kumjai, Anucha seems to be in a fertility ritual (as described for instance by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*) which sees him being crowned or given the new leader's role by playing the part of the dying leader. Prem, the pupil, assumes the role of the killer; the student is the killer of the teacher in the ritual re-enactment. The next paragraph which continues from this point seems to be in the mode of a detective story, but one where the physical facts are already known:

> Because Anucha, on that tragic day, had been assigned to protect seventy students at the far end of the march, he could not have noticed a man and a motorcyclist waiting at the spot where the road on the ridge dipped to meet the street. But Kumjai must have seen them, had perhaps smiled at his murderer and the accomplice, hoping that they would join the protest. As the spearhead of the protest march dipped with the road, Anucha had heard five gunshots. The children had screamed and ran wildly away from the scene while the motorcycle sped off, leaving the fatally wounded school teacher and its poisonous fumes behind. (667)

This scene is symbolic, even in the matter of factness of the series of events deductively reconstructed in it. Anucha at the end of the spear-like column is juxtaposed with Kumjai at the "spearhead". The sacrificed teacher smiles at his killers, seeming to misunderstand their

intentions as benevolent. In place of the one bullet that kills Khonkai's Piya, there are five bullets that kill Kumjai. These five bullets symbolically represent the evil counterpart to the five "David Stones" or stories, one of which Prem is developing in this scene. The ceremonial and militant aspects of the protest are highlighted by the description of the protest as a "march". The symbolism is reinforced by the "poisonous" fumes left behind by the killers' motorcycle which was polluting the air with its carbon monoxide exhaust fumes.

Once the facts known to the participants on that day have been explained, the story is recounted for a second time. This repetition underscores the ritualistic aspect of the narrative event:

> Following Charles' advice, the enactors agreed not to involve the schoolchildren in the resurrection of the killing scene. And so the new headmaster alone, in Kumjai's shoes, moved conspicuously to the dip of the road where the hired gunman and the motorcyclist awaited their victim. Prem trembled with the effort to channel his inner vision into an invisible laser beam so as to penetrate the heart of the murderer. Thus he saw and felt and suffered the evil deed. With the buffalo's eye still held fast, Prem approached and shook the teacher's hand and held it while they gazed emotionally at each other. "I could see who are the real killers but I would not waste a curse on them. The late Napo seer, Grandpa Tatip forbade me to. So instead I shall hound them in my own way," Prem promised, making Charles the witness. (667–668)

In the second version of the event, Prem's psychic powers, his Etan buffalo vision, is the centre of the story. The hand he shakes may be Anucha's in the re-enactment, but it is also the symbolic hand of the dead Kumjai who is re-embodied in his successor Anucha, who he seems to be re-embodied in. Missing from the scene is any emotional response by Prem to the actual death he has had a vision of; he is focused on understanding the killer who performs the sacrifice, not the victim. There is no pathos for the grail-like dying god-king, the dead headmaster.

The deaths of Regnitz, Tatip and Kumjai are bound together in this scene. As a dramatic work of art about death, as a dramatized ritual, it recalls Regnitz's tone poem *Tod*, while Tatip's injunction against Prem using his spirit power to curse those who do wrong is repeated to explain why Prem does not seek to punish Kumjai's killers. What Prem sees is not included in the novel; we do not read Prem's story. Instead, it is diverted out of the text and into the story "The Gunman" already published in Sudham's *Tales of Thailand*. Another

similarity between the three deaths is that we do not see Kumjai dying, or the reactions of others to his death. What is resurrected here is not Kumjai but the scene in which the killing occurred; it is a dramatic resurrection scene without the victim. The person who comes to life in Prem's artistic and spiritual vision is the killer. As one of the enactors, Prem is involved in the scene when it is repeated; his mind enters the mind of the killer through being in the same physical space where Kumjai had earlier died. The teacher's death has been de-centred and distanced; there is no emotional response such as we find in the death of the teacher in *Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*. We do not see the schoolchildren crying in Prem's re-enacted drama as they have been excluded from the resurrection as if to suggest that their emotional responses would have interfered with Prem's vision. Sudham foregrounds this perspective when he describes Prem's vision in this scene as an "invisible laser beam" focused on one point only. The scene has significance as the impetus for a work of art or New Journalism, Prem's story which he subsequently writes. As such, Kumjai's death is turned into material which helps Prem develop his own artistic skills. In the story "The Gunman" in Sudham's *Tales of Thailand*, this decentring of Kumjai continues; he is not mentioned by name, although the scene of his assassination is the same as in the novel. The story is written in the first person, from the viewpoint of the killer who shows remorse when he reads of the teacher's death in the newspaper. The killer in the short story decides to leave Thailand for Laos to avoid being killed himself. The lesson learned, as with Tatip and Regnitz, is from the living, not the dead. Suffering (*dukkha*) is a life experience, not a death one. The lives of the characters are significant in terms of how the experiences of the characters lead to their deaths. The characters return to life as works of art in Prem's life and as characters in works of art in Sudham's work, not as ghosts or vengeful spirits. The focus in Sudham's vision is always on the life force where the force of karma works, not the fear of death. This intertextual chain of events is the cultural source of the mythic ritualistic quality of Sudham's art. The reader of *Shadowed Country* is led exophorically out of the novel and perhaps back in time to other works by Sudham which change their meaning when read in the context of the novel. Nothing seems to die forever, at least for a Thai Buddhist novelist.

The Ecology of a Wasteland

The deaths of characters in Sudham's novel are less significant in themselves and more significant as passage ways or transitions that enable Prem to grow as an artist and as a

teacher. As such they are proxemic markers that organize the text's space in terms of the deaths of those close to Prem.

Sudham points the reader of the novel to read beyond or outside the text, to connect other stories already written by Sudham in order to understand the textual and cultural schemata being evoked by the writer. As with Prem's five "David Stones", the various works gain strength through their proxemic thematic closeness to one another while being textually distant from each other. In this organic movement, the novel explicates the stories as much as the stories explicate the novel. The previous lives of the stories which lead to the novel function in the same way as the lives of Tatip, Regnitz and Kumjai insofar as the prior lives of the art and the characters explain their significance in the novel. There is no linear path to a final goal or *telos*: the novels and the stories are always in a state of flux as they are refashioned and expanded in each other's light, becoming parts of each other in an organic form that is particularly Thai in its shape.

The growth of Sudham's oeuvre in part is achieved through the deaths of the artist, the shaman and the teacher, each of whose roles seems to be taken up by Sudham the creative writer. Just as Wealdon's life in the Prologue set in the nineteenth century is absorbed in Prem's experience, so are the lives of the archetypes of the shaman, the artist and the teacher. Prem's previous experiences shape his life as he grows into the artist Sudham, just as, in an autobiographical sense, Sudham's previous experiences in life and in his work grow into Prem's life as a character who embodies Sudham. The karmic wheel is the archetype of a learning experience, as is suggested by Wealdon's name: the wheel is the don or teacher. The wheel which never stops turning suggests the writer's view of his art as not having an ending or a death, but a cycle. Each time he writes, he changes the relations of all his other works through what may be understood in terms of what David Bohm (1980) calls the implicate order: that everything is connected is a lesson of Buddhism and Thai animism.

When the lives of Tatip, Regnitz and Kumjai are placed together, they take on a wider mythic significance which is related to the land where Prem has grown as a buffalo boy who learns to live inside his own buffalo Etan's eyes which are the source of his animistic visionary powers. What Prem sees and represents in his art, and what Sudham represents in the novel cycle with its intertextualized stories, is the "wasteland" (370, 508, 531, 666), the "cursed" (633) land, that is Esarn over which falls the shadow of the dark lord, a spirit power as much as a symbolic power representing corruption and political violence committed against the minds of the people of Esarn as students in the Thai education system and against the land itself which is destroyed by property developers. The mind and the land are

inseparable or entwined aspects of the wasteland with its mythic echoes of Jessie L. Weston's study of the Grail romances and with T.S. Eliot's modernist epic mythic poem *The Wasteland*. Sudham, as Prem, sees Esarn as the "cursed land" (633) and seems to work to lift the curse through his own deeds which will work off the karma he has accrued as Wealdon.

As a teacher in Esarn at the end of the novel, Prem works to ensure that his students have "growing minds", "a wholesome and a well developed mind", not "stunted and deformed as his had been" (747). He returns to England occasionally to see the mythically and epically suggestively named boy Priam who:

> must be free and untouched by a mind-maiming method aimed to foster subservience and mindlessness which in turn permitted corruption to progress punitively, enabling the Dark Lord to expand greatly and govern ruthlessly without challenge, without trammels. (747)

The allusion to the myth of Troy in the child's name links the ending of the novel to a mythic structure of meaning. The destruction of the land as a result of corruption and ignorance can only be fought with the education of the young. In performing this task, he is maintaining what Gregory Bateson (1982) refers to as the "ecology of the mind", the destruction of which by the Dark Lord's education system ensures that the cycle of *dukkha* (101) or suffering continues as a spiritual death of the minds of its victims. The novel itself both embodies Prem's way, his education out of the darkness (585), and Sudham's vision of his role as a writer who embodies the teacher, the artist and the seer. As such, both character and novelist create life out of death in a pattern of the karmic cycle.

Sudham's educative and ecological themes are entwined in the cyclical shape of his work. Change, understood in Buddhist terms as impermanence, comes as part of the cycle of life and death. Prem leaves Esarn only to return with the force of karma on his side once he has learned the lessons taught by the seer, the artist and the teacher. His survival is ensured under the protection of the Mother Spirit until he has worked out his karma (745) through his ecological acts of protecting the natural and mental environments of his village. Against the "corruption" (747) of death is the "conception" (747) or birth of Prem's plans to keep his child, Priam, away from the Dark Lord who still rules the shadowed country where Prem works at "nurturing the growing minds" (747) of his students which would otherwise be "stunted and deformed" (747).

The formal significance of the typically Thai continually morphing shapes of the novel is that the Thai view of life as the experience of impermanence as change is a symbolic assertion of the hope that while things can change for the worse, they can also be changed for the better through education and that writing is the novelist's way of participating in the process. The rooting of the novel's growth in terms of the creative changes it embodies in each of its new-born cyclical iterations seems, in the context of the ecology of the Thai mind, to offer hope that while things remain in flux that change at all levels of life is possible. The "death" of previous forms of the fictions that are embodied in *Shadowed Country* are transformed into their next life in the novel. Inanimate things, even novels, have a life force for the people of Esarn who see their environment animistically.

In conclusion: the beginnings of *Shadowed Country* in previous fictions allow the writer to recycle and preserve his work. The beginnings and current endings are brought together to create a larger space that is the printed version of the novel *Shadowed Country*. This proxemic closeness of the re-embodied texts is a form of textual karma. Given Sudham's emphasis on saving the ecology of Esarn and his Thai conceptions of the proxemic closeness of all things in time and space, his novel seems to be a major embodiment of Thai cultural values which are based on the death and rebirth of language and art as much as of people. All things from the apparently dead past are absorbed, expanded, and changed: nothing is wasted. This is the karmic principle that guides Sudham's vision of life and death as he shapes this vision into his reborn fictions.

Sudham's essentially Thai vision of the novel as an art form shaped by death and rebirth, while seemingly foreign to a Western reader who expects novels to finish once they have been published and to conform in a way to Roland Barthes' view of the "death of the writer" need to open themselves to the non-Western idea that things never die as such, once and for all, and that novels are open, not closed: while the author may die, the life force understood as the karmic creativity of the artist / seer / teacher who understands his role in terms that are firmly rooted in the soil from which he grows, means that the writer as artist lives on in his work which should be understood in ecological terms as part of the life / death cycle which recognizes the proxemic closeness of the two forces as entangled in each other as part of the natural mythic cycle. This reading of the novel in terms of the social, cultural and religious ideas and beliefs that create, shape and reform its form and content suggests that a new way of reading and enjoying the new literatures of English is possible in terms of a way of seeing verbal art in the mythic patterns that are still alive in their elemental and real shapes as life is experienced in the Thailand of Pira Canning Sudham.

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Michael Wilding's *Wild Bleak Bohemia*

Abstract

This essay discusses the various aspects of Michael Wilding's work as an academic, creative writer, teacher, publisher and editor in terms of the ecological relationships he is able to maintain in these areas. Such relationships may be understood in terms of his attempts to develop cooperative relationships with others. The tone of the essay is as much informal as it is formal; spoken as it is written; personal as it is detached. The meaning of any communicative action is as much a matter of form as it is of content. In discussing his attraction to, and then turn away from, postmodernism, the argument is made that such a return to the ideas of realism seems a natural thing. But, as he is about to publish a documentary on the early literary scene in the Australian colonies as *Wild Bleak Bohemia*, the question is asked: have recent developments in the Australian literary scene created such another apparently bleak scene for the creative writer, academic, publisher and teacher? Wilding's experience may have much to teach those who seem perplexed by the current state of literary life, not only in Australia, but in their own environments.

Keywords: Michael Wilding, collaboration, *Wild Bleak Bohemia*, ecology

In his 2013 book length study of Michael Wilding's fiction, the American academic Don Graham asks why Wilding's work hasn't been more recognized or considered in recent years. While Graham doesn't pretend to solve this mystery, he argues that Wilding's fiction is worthy of much more attention. Speaking personally, this state of affairs surprised me. I have lived outside Australia for the past twenty-three years and so didn't notice this swing in literary tastes or spaces. My distance from the literary environment here blindsided me about this turn of events. Back in the late 1970s and through the 1980s when I studied with Wilding, he was clearly a central figure in the Australian literary landscape in many ways: as a proponent of "new writing", as an academic with several serious books, as a publisher who, along with Pat Woolley, made available in Australia many seminal overseas writers in what was to become postmodernist fiction as well as other more counter-cultural books, and as an editor who had helped introduce Australian writers such as Peter Carey to an international audience and had edited a series for University of Queensland Press of Australian and Pacific Writing, Wilding seemed to be a tyro in developing what I understood to be Australian

literary spaces. What impressed me about him as a supervisor was his open-minded willingness to listen to my ideas, and even to my criticisms of his academic work in terms of specific errors of fact regarding William Morris's and Jack London's work as we talked for hours in his two-storey office on the top floor of this building or out on the roof in his private garden space. When he asked if I would correct any typos in the galley proof of his Political Fictions, I did so . . . somewhat heavy-handedly, but he wasn't defensive about my comments or "grammar corrections", some of which he accepted. I was nervous doing this, but it taught me a lot when later I started working with my own graduate students and tried to get them motivated to have a voice in what was being published in Thailand, China or Vietnam. Respecting students as equal partners in research and writing wasn't something that was taught in education text books. He even "tolerated" my arguments with him in public in the Feminist English Literature Teachers (FELT) discussion of George Meredith's Beauchamp's Career organised by Margaret Harris and Judy Barbour. When I offered a concluding chapter to my MA thesis that suggested Marx's Capital could be read as a novel, he didn't reject it outright; instead, he said he didn't understand the Baudrillardian theory and argued with me about whether it was a coherent conclusion to my thesis, leaving it up to me to decide whether to include it. Years later, when reading Pira Sudham's The Force of Karma, I found this voice again in an episode where Prem, the autobiographical hero of Sudham's novels, is told by a tutor named Michael Wild (later to be turned into "Michael Wilding" in Shadowed Country in a rewriting of the episode) that he could say anything . . . as long as he had a cogent or rational argument and facts to support that argument. In a way, my own personal experience was being echoed or reinforced by this reading of a Thai novelist's work in another time and place. It was Pira Sudham who put me back in contact with Wilding by giving me his copy of Wilding's Academia Nuts in 2004 as well as Wilding's email address. I hadn't seen him since I had approached him to help me organize a series of literary readings at the Sandringham Hotel in 1988 when he had brought Vicki Viidikas, Robert Adamson and Stephen Oliver down to the pub which was then an alternative music venue.

After reestablishing contact with Wilding, he asked if I wanted to write a story for a forthcoming book *Best Stories Under the Sun* that he was editing with David Myers. I had shown Wilding a novel I had written as an undergraduate earlier in my studies here which he had critiqued as erratic and liable to get me into trouble as it was clearly a roman à clef in parts. (It was also under the influence of Bukowski's stories and Wilding's own *The Phallic Forest* stories.) After I had finished my PhD, he had advised me to go into writing fiction and to avoid academic life. This was advice I followed until I moved to Thailand in 1992. After

the book came out, I asked him to serve as a member of the editorial board on one of the journals I was developing. He readily agreed. In the interim, David Myers passed away and Wilding wrote an "in memoriam" of him for the first issue of the journal in 2007. Since then, he has been one of the few board members willing to be actively engaged in the journal's development.

What these perhaps ephemeral stories show is Wilding as an active participant in developing writers and avenues for creative work anywhere and at any time. He didn't have to do these things. Many others may have thought there were no kudos or academic credits to be gained from these efforts, or such tasks were beneath them. But, as before when he was supervising or examining my work as a student, there were no gulfs or social spaces that he found insurmountable; he seems to reach out to anyone who is involved in trying to get creative work published and to help them do it.

I tell these "stories-in-brief" to illustrate my own personal connections with the material of this paper and to demonstrate what I mean by an "insider" or emic approach to the study of literary spaces as actually experienced spaces. There is a sense of reality that we need to grasp when we study literature in the real world; not as a theoretical abstraction. This background knowledge is part of our schemata that we need to bring to the study of literary work; it helps to ground us and, hopefully, to make us better communicators in whatever literary spaces we inhabit at one time or another. This way, we can get "under the skin" of the texts we read and experience them as lived experiences. The stories we develop in our criticism and teaching based on our reading experience seem more truthful and sincere once we have gone through this experience. By grounding ourselves in the facts of these experiences, we connect with the communicative network felt by the artist and help to connect others (our readers and students) to that communicative network as important participants in it.

In preparing this paper, I was led back to Walter Benjamin's studies of Bertolt Brecht with which I introduced my MA thesis. Benjamin noticed a note Brecht had attached to a ceiling beam. It read "Truth is concrete". Benjamin's time spent discussing the state of literature with Brecht led him to absorb many of Brecht's ideas. In "The Author as Producer" he gives Brecht's view inside his own voice, as unacknowledged reported speech, as if they were both speaking when they say:

> Now it is true that opinions matter greatly, but the best are of no use if they make nothing useful out of those who have them. The best political tendency is wrong if it

> does not demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed. And this attitude the writer can only demonstrate in his particular activity; that is, in writing. A political tendency is the necessary, never the sufficient condition of the organizing function of a work. This further requires a directing, instructing stance on the part of the writer. And today this is to be demanded more than ever before. An author who teaches writers nothing, teaches no one. What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators. (Reflections: 233. Emphasis in the original.)

This perhaps lengthy quote or chunk from Benjamin's address is included here for several reasons. It is a technique Wilding himself uses throughout his critical writings in order to give the reader a representative sample of the text being interpreted so that his reader has enough information to judge the fairness of the critic's judgments or interpretations. Such a technique also allows the writer's voice its own space so that the critic's voice doesn't overbearingly drown it out. The passage is a factual thing. It is evidence. It also provides a lot of contextual information that the reader may use in evaluating the critic's work. A more thematic point to be made is that Benjamin's committed view of the role of the artist remains valid even now when discussing the political and social visions of Michael Wilding who, like Benjamin and Brecht, has tried to turn the means of (literary) production in the direction of empowering workers (and students can be workers) to produce their own work through a pedagogy of art. I hope that my own brief stories that began this paper have demonstrated concrete experiences of how Wilding has done such things in terms of developing small presses, distributing new writers' works, teaching and writing. The artist is a teacher who collaborates with other writers, students and teachers to develop new approaches to art. Our function is, to invert Benjamin's italicized words, to learn from other writers; otherwise we learn nothing. And if we don't learn, then how can we teach?

In an interview with Teresa Burns in the *Journal of the Western Mystery Tradition* in 2013, Wilding explains his turn away from postmodernism towards a renovated realism in the following terms:

> In *The Paraguayan Experiment* I made a dialectical reversal from the post-modernism of *The Short Story Embassy* and *Pacific Highway*. The political was uppermost in the

> Lane material and I returned to a determinedly realistic mode, though I retained the modernist device of collage to incorporate documentary material . . . I don't want at all to minimize the formal and aesthetic aspects of writing; but these emerge from an engagement with subject matter. I came out of postmodernism with a new interest in the story, in narrative, and with a renewed concern to engage with content, with the world around me, with the political. And this also changed my approach to literary criticism.

Here, there is a nexus between his academic and creative work that seem to exist in an ecological relationship whereby a change in one of his areas leads to changes in other areas. The turn back towards political realism comes out of the material he was studying and working on for his novel. He doesn't impose an alien pattern or form on it. What seems to lead him to move in a particular direction is his experience in life as a researcher and writer as he responds to others' requests; he was asked to write a libretto for an opera on William Lane and then developed an interest in Lane's writings and utopian experiments in transporting Australian workers to South America in the aftermath of the Shearers' Strike.

Wilding's turn towards realism and away from postmodernism raises the question of the respective spaces these two forms of writing hold in his overall work. He suggests that there is a dialectical relationship between them and that he has learned techniques from postmodernism he can usefully apply in his more recent studies and fictions. In his novel *Academia Nuts* (his critique of the academic critics) the two forms are juxtaposed pedagogically as he writes about the ways academic space has been morphing under the onslaught of utilitarian quality assurance drives amongst other things. By turning our backs on such onslaughts, we have been complicit in the apparent degradation of the university as a vital space in society and we have become depoliticized to such a degree in our postmodern malaise that our academic space is collapsing or morphing into hyper-reality. Again, in his Burns interview, Wilding voices his later judgments on postmodernism when he explains his original attraction to it was to extend modernism:

> This was a long time ago, before the more dubious implications of the late modernist or proto-post-modernist project had been thought through, before we had put our minds to the dehumanizing and de-politicizing, or at any rate de-radicalizing agenda.

Here, the use of the inclusive collective pronoun "we" hints at Wilding's sense of or attraction to a community of writers or academics working together. While for some, this

may lead off on a tangent to questions of "identity" in the abstract, a reader of Wilding's fiction would hear a common chord in the ways he represents others around him in *The West Midland Underground* and particularly in *Pacific Highway* where the narrator's interests are focused on the relationships of those in his group of friends as they resist the encroachments of a malevolent outside world shaded with politically reactionary intentions to harm their idyllic environment.

One consistent characteristic in Wilding's writings has been the need to develop a sense of solidarity and community. This in part explains his interest in writing about political novelists and in his focus on particular writers in the Australian "canon" such as Furphey, Lawson, Lane, Clarke and Stead. Without taking this sense of a common space into account, his latest work, the forthcoming *Wild Bleak Bohemia* makes little sense. But once that work of 580 pages (by far his largest textual space in terms of words or printed pages) is seen in the context of wider themes in Wilding's work in all its spaces, it makes sense, almost teleologically, as a coming together of many of the issues and concerns that bind Wilding's work together as a cohesive whole: there is a narrative thread that winds throughout his work that isn't broken in his turn away from postmodernism and that gives his work a sense of organic ecological integrity. By following the underground streams in Wilding's work that lead to *Wild Bleak Bohemia*, a sense may be gained of how the writer configures his various literary spaces or lives into art, scholarship and criticism while regaining a sense of the paradisal or at least utopian impulse in his work that may have been obscured in his earlier postmodern fiction's version of such a paradise as a "disporting around in the sea of self-referentiality which was fun for a time but which you wouldn't want to spend your life in" (Burns interview). By going back to the nineteenth century, to the lives of those writers who laid the groundwork for Australian literature, he seems to be offering yet another new way of studying and writing about Australia and its literature as an alternative to the poststructuralist ways that he has turned away from. In developing this way, he has brought together his skills in research as well as his interest in detective or crime fiction to offer a documentary where the writer's voice is absent from the "big narrative" except as the arranger of the materials that are allowed to speak for themselves, in their own voices.

One key aspect of the way the book is organized is Wilding's interest in the use of parallels that seems to be an organizing idea in much of his writing as a way of developing a communal sense of togetherness in whatever community he is involved with at the time; whether it is in his Wild and Woolley publisher's memoir, his campus fiction, his work in the New South Wales Writers' Centre with Irina Dunn, his editing of academic books, or his

work with others as collaborators in various phases of his life. This technique of parallelism is not a new aspect of Wilding's art or thought; it can be observed in much of his literary criticism, thus suggesting the parallel relationship between the various spaces in his overall work. These parallels are not accidental or gratuitous; they are one of the key organizing structures in his work. This may be seen in his *Studies in Classic Australian Literature*, the title itself paralleling D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

In his study of Lawson, Wilding recognizes a number of parallels in Lawson's work that together form an argument that convinces the reader of the accuracy of Wilding's reading. The parallels may start with his epigraph from Edward Garnett where Garnett refers to himself as "the unsophisticated critic". In the context of theoretical sophistication which is the academic backdrop of Wilding's later academic work, such an identification asserts the writer's distance or difference to those who may be (mis)reading his criticism. Lawson, like Wilding, started writing in small presses (such as *The Republican* and *The Dawn*). In his essay, Wilding provides the facts about Lawson first, before discussing his stories as literature. He notes that William Morris published Lawson's "The Hymn of the Socialists" in *Commonweal*, Morris's own small alternative press, in 1889. He then rejects Manning Clark's criticism of a lack of a coherent ideology in Lawson by noting that "the lack of any coherent ideology was a strength". This gives Lawson's ballad published by Morris a sense of "openness". Then a link is seen between Lawson and Lane in Lawson's connection to Lane's small press (*The Boomerang*) and the use of the term "workingman's paradise". Wilding also stresses parallels with future left wing figures such as Jack Lang who was Lawson's brother-in-law. Once these parallels have been made, Wilding observes Lawson's own technique of parallels in the Jones' Alley stories where Arvie Aspinall's death is looked at in different ways in four of the stories in the collection. The implications of this "paralleling" are that it is left to the reader to recognize them as "the oblique, the understated", as evidence for "a shared pattern of class exploitation": Nothing is spelt out—there is no generalizing, no theory, no moral drawing. The bare facts, presented in parallel, reveal the sociopolitical truth.

Another parallel is the one Lawson sees between what happens on the land and in the city in "A Day on the Selection: A Sketch from Observation". Wilding notes that life on the land and the "intellectual context" are paralleled and "both are sketched from Lawson's lived experience". Yet another form of parallel is Wilding's use of allusions. These are frequent in Wilding's critical and creative work. He asks "When Adam delved and Eve spanned, who then was the gentleman?"—a reference to the Lollard John Ball, who was also a hero in

William Morris' political fiction *The Dream of John Ball*. Such unacknowledged verbal echoes form a scaffolding of other invisible voices that support the story or the point of view being expressed or built up. The old word "solidarity" that seems to have dropped out of fashion now comes to mind as the understated message of such a technique of collage or pastiche. This aspect of Wilding's language remains throughout his work, though, perhaps his postmodern sojourn enabled him to play with these voices in ways that strengthened his own voice to the point that he didn't need the support of explicit self-referentiality to continue them in his later work.

Another form of paralleling is only visible or audible in hindsight. It suggests that certain words or ideas remain in Wilding's underground stream or catchment area of experiences to emerge later in another context or work. Such is the observation that "The Drover's Wife" "is not a totally bleak vision"; there is the background idea of One Big Union which at the time of Lawson's writing was being developed by Big Bill Haywood in America as the I.W.W. or the Wobblies. Wilding notes that Lawson in this story does what Lane does in *The Workingman's Paradise*: critically examine Charles Kingsley's view of socialism from an Australian context. Wilding notes that Lawson boarded with Lane's wife at the time and frequented McNamara's bookshop, "a library and centre for international radical journals and discussions". Here the parallel to Wilding's own continued interest in small presses is resounded through an even deeper allusion to his own writing and modes of production. These verbal echoes and reverberations give us insights into how the artist's mind works in a dialectical way with what he or she reads. We see things in what we read that are there; they are not paranoid projections induced by the use of drugs or forced on the material through an over-vigorous use of Theory.

In his Lawson essay, Wilding then registers the switch made by Lawson from impressionism to realism after 1902 with the perceived collapse of socialist hopes. Instead of having to write very short pieces to fit the *Bulletin* format, Lawson could experiment with the more discursive modes of British magazine realism that he found when he went to England and wrote "The Letters of Jack Cornstalk". Lawson's attack on the spaces of St Paul's which were meant to be "suggestive of wide open spaces" (Lawson labels such a view a "useless lie of civilization") is linked by Wilding to D.H. Lawrence's attack on the idea of the university in *The Rainbow*. In both writers, there is a parallel absence of politics "displaced into nationalism" as a result of what Wilding understands as Lawson's (and Lawrence's) crisis in art because "his political commitment became increasingly inexpressible" in the mainstream commercial press. This crisis led to Lawson's new mode of "realism with his socialist

commitment". The meaning of Wilding's own realist approach to literary studies is clear in his denunciation of abstract or overtly theory-driven criticism:

> To read Lawson's stories out of context, to exclude this [radical socialist] milieu in which he lived, wrote, published and took his pleasure, is to give a deprived and inadequate and ultimately absurd account of his art . . . When, however, we restore the historical context of Lawson's work, when we resituate it in its once contemporary context of ideas, a much fuller reading emerges. (Studies in Classic Australian Literature, 69, 75)

These observations of Australian literature made by Wilding are not new to his approach. Adumbrations of his approach to writing about the lives of Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall in *Wild Bleak Bohemia* can be traced back in an underground stream to an essay he published on Clarke in 1974 (in *The Australian Experience*: 19–37) when he was first playing with postmodernist fiction. In response to the suggestion by G.A. Wilkes, the founding professor of Australian Literature here, that Clarke's presentation of convict conditions "verges on the sensational" and "the aggregation [of brutalities] produces a melodramatic effect" with its monotonous brutality, Wilding retorts:

> Again the restraint, the detached manner of narration, makes the horror more telling. Clarke uses a similar detachment of manner in his scrupulousness about the precise months and years, and about geographical accuracy. This both emphasizes the documentary aspect of the book, and underlies the horror. The suppression of human aspects by historical objectivity are drawn attention to all the more forcefully by that very suppression. For the contents of these chapters are facts that cannot be divorced from any humane or emotional response.

Wilding's reading of what he sees as Clarke's "unemotional dispassionate factual objectivity" could be carried forward to his own approach in *Wild Bleak Bohemia*. The apparent coincidences in the story of Clarke's novel do more than tidy up the novel by creating resolutions or transitional links between its parts: they stress the relationships and familial connections in the "paralleling" (to use Wilding's term) of lives. In place of Wilkes' reading of the novel as being melodramatic, Wilding offers a view of it as "a novel of the most powerful, most hopeless despair".

The segue from Wilding circa 1974 to Wilding 2014 is not a long leap; it has been prepared for in his own critical writings, work in small presses and publishing and in his own art in which a sense of the real has always been present, even in his postmodern fictions. The research and editing techniques used in *Wild Bleak Bohemia* are organically developed throughout Wilding's writings in various literary spaces. These consistencies give his work a sense of ecological vitality that in part is sustained by his abiding interest in observing parallels in whatever material he is working in. When we recall his description of his turn away from postmodernism as a "dialectical reversal" in his Teresa Burns interview from 2013, we hear yet another, leftist, echo in his strategies that link him to the work of Brecht more than has been currently recognized. His word for this dialectic has been "parallelism" and it emphasizes the contrasts and contradictions in the literature he reads, teaches and criticizes as well as in the literature he writes and publishes. But it also registers continuities. In *The West Midland Underground* (1975), a book of short stories that often parallel each other, Wilding has said things that seem to adumbrate his later realism: the narrator of one of his stories records that his story is "the flexing exercises of my writing, though in this case not my fiction, and my impulse is not the autonomy of creation, but the obsessive accuracy of recollection" (156). In the same book of stories another of his narrators observes that all writers now (in what was later to be labelled as the postmodern era) have a realist novel secretly buried in their desk draw. These secret novels seem a version of what D.H. Lawrence labelled as the "dirty little secret" of sex that was suppressed in English fiction when he was writing. Given Wilding's affinities with Lawrence's work and the allusions to it in his writing as well as his essay on Lawrence's Australian novel *Kangaroo* (published in *Political Fictions*), the parallels between realism and sexuality in Wilding's work need to be further studied. Both writers can be seen as outsiders observing Australian conditions as English writers and seeing things that those inside maybe don't see as they are immersed too much in the climate of their age.

Throughout his fiction, Wilding and his narrators observe people from the outside; the psychologies of those around them are not contemplated in some Jamesian way. Instead, the readers have to do that work themselves—if they so wish. Characters speak for themselves and show us how they think in their own words; meanings are not imposed on their words, as their language is far too complex for such readings to be realistically done. When a narrator tries to engage with another's language, the result is a complicated failure or breakdown in communication. Better to leave such impositions alone or run the risk of getting lost in one's own hyper-real nightmarish world of theory-building where no facts are offered to

corroborate a reading of others' minds. What characters actually say are the only real facts we have; we have to look to their actual words as documentary evidence, as ethnomethodologists who try to understand emicly how the people in what Del Hymes calls a "communicative event" interpret each other, from inside the social situation or historical context. Even in his "new writing" period in the 1970s, Wilding has remained grounded in the actual words spoken by his characters in the various forms of dialogical communication they try to have with each other. These are yet another form of the "facts" and they give a documentary feel to all his fictions that relate his creative and academic languages in a diglossic form: not of a High and Low variety of a language, but of a creative and an academic one . . . though, perhaps nowadays the complicated hyper-real language all too often found in academic discourse may have assumed a "higher" or more prestigious position than the languages actually used by creative writers in the real world.

Over the 580 pages of his latest work *Wild Bleak Bohemia*, the parallel stories of Marcus Clarke, Henry Kendall and Adam Lindsay Gordon as they struggle in an Australian version of Balzac's *Lost Illusions*, or in a parallel story or contemporary companion account of the social and personal conditions surrounding Clarke's writing of *His Natural Life*, Wilding has created a dialectical antithesis or opposite to what he wrote as a creative writer and critic before: a documentary where the authorial voice of Wilding is suppressed, much as Wilding notes Clarke suppresses comment in *His Natural Life*.

To rebuild realism as a new form, Wilding only inserts his own words to introduce documentary source material; as grammatical glue or cement that supplies the cohesion needed as one document segues into another document so that the voices recorded by the participants in the series of communicative events that comprise the narrative can speak for themselves in a form of liberation linguistics, in their own words. They tell their own and each others' stories and interpret each others' communications. The documentarian's "voice" is silently there in the paralinguistic or body language of the text that forms a seamless whole without any chapter divisions; instead, pilcrows are used to mark shifts in focus as the three main lives are put into parallel relations in the "editing" process to create a sense of the relentless forces that tear the creative writers apart and bring them together in colonial Australia. On the rare occasions when Wilding's own voice can be seen and heard in the text, it is only as a darkness visible to highlight connections to other writers in other times and spaces, such as when he notes of Clarke towards the end of the document: "He had opened up the territory that Henry Lawson was to develop" (356). To have done more would have harmed the ecology of the text by imposing breaks that were not there in the historical

experience: chapter headings, a table of contents or an index would have ruined the renovated realism of the text and turned it too heavy-handedly in the direction of academic work. Instead, the text remains finely balanced between creative and critical writing.

This may be a new form of criticism, a specifically Australian one rooted in the historical evidence that Wilding has painstakingly rescued from materials in libraries that now seem to be torn to pieces in this age of economic ratioacademic and creativealization. Access to such documents may well prove to be harder in future for writers (both academic and creative) who wish to research their historical materials and provide empirical evidence in support of their views.

But the effort to do such work is needed. Wilding's achievement is to bring the reader of the documents into the production of the text by turning the means of production in the direction of a renovated radical approach to Australian writing. To parallel Brecht's / Benjamin's words recorded earlier in this paper: What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production . . . to put an improved apparatus at their [the readers, students and critics] disposal. And this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators.

Wilding has been reaching out for such collaborators throughout his writings as a way of building a community of creative scholars who are committed to realizing the social visions that Wilding sees as shaping his world, his spaces. Insofar as he succeeds in this project, his writings achieve an ecological strength, a connectivity that may open new vistas in Australian literature and criticism. But the question of whether his work will be recognized as a major contribution to Australian literature in the current literary climate may remain an open or problematical one unless and until others respond to his efforts to build collaborative bridges within Australian literature and between that literature and the international context.

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The New Idea of the University as an Academic Theme Park: *Academia Nuts*

Abstract

This essay offers a reading of Michael Wilding's novel *Academia Nuts* as a political fiction, as a dystopia that may already be with us. The argument is made from the point of view of a critic writing within the Asian context who reads literature in terms of issues that actually matter in Asia. For this reason, the social and political background to the reading is set out before a criticism of the novel is offered.

The writer's context does matter. So does the reader's. If, as Wilding suggests, the university has lost its way, then how does this impact on the reader working in an Asian university? The essay suggests that Wilding's novel is a timely contribution to the issues being discussed in many Asian universities now. By making this connection, it argues that novels can have a real impact in the world; that they are not only grist in the mill of Theory-driven hyperreal exercises that have turned too many Departments of English in the west into irrelevant and therefore harmful institutions which, instead of advancing the usage of the English language, are undermining the continued creative development of it.

The writer assumes an homology between what is being conceived of as the appropriate usage of English in western universities and the teaching of the English language in courses in Asia. Any teacher who has tried to use literature in the language classroom in Asia has probably met with a lot of resistance from course designers, fellow teachers and many students who think that learning English is best expressed by the equation Grammar + Vocabulary + Phonology = English = Job. Any English Department wanting to attract good students who may still feel the need to learn how to really use the English language has a vested interest in correcting the current misconceived attitudes. However, if those English Departments are lost in the illusion that English can be bureaucratized and packaged as marketable "texts", then the open-ended question remains: What hope is there for the English language in Asia and in the west? The fates of both are intertwined.

What is the university now? This question has been asked with increasing frequency over the past decade in Asia. For instance, several ASAIHIL conferences have been organized around the theme. In the rationales for such conferences, the reason for this interest is often given as the need to understand the impact of globalization on local Asian universities which are

developing within the context of free market competition from imported programs offered by non-Asian universities—programs aimed at filling the perceived hole created by both the increased demand for higher learning in Asia and by the local universities' apparent incapacity to meet that need. This trend in higher education has been predicated on the demand for English courses in Asia to equip students with the language skills they will need to study abroad or find a job with a foreign company. In the west, this expansion into Asia is largely driven by the cash-flow crisis for western universities since the times of Margaret Thatcher, Malcolm Fraser and Paul Keating who "de-regulated" their universities in order to make them compete for students as customers instead of as learners.

Implicit in Asian academics asking the question of what a university is there are several assumptions that seem natural. The etymology of the word "university" conveys a sense of the universal, suggesting that a university is the same thing in any country. There is also the suggestion that the idea of the university needs clarification in the Asian context. In the accepted paradigm of the global village, such questions are answerable by any person concerned with the question. And such answers are meant to be applicable to all universities.

However, what is missed in such discussions is that the term "university' is itself a western one. So far, the debates have been framed in terms of developmental economics by asking what Asian universities can learn from the universities in the west to make them better at competing with the western universities to provide academic services to prospective students. Implicit in this model is the erroneous belief that the western university has the answers as it has been in the business for centuries, whereas the Asian university is a more recent development and therefore in need of guidance from the west.

Such assumptions and beliefs carry within them other ideas which need to be discussed and questioned.

While the logic of the university's universality suggests that all universities should be in such a dialogue, the reality is that the western university is doing the talking and guiding while the Asian university is meant to change or develop itself so as to fit the vision. In other words, the university idea is a western export. This explains partly why many Asian universities send their faculty members to western universities for doctorates. There is a clear perception in the market place that a faculty member trained in the west is better than one trained in Asia. It seems only natural that an Asian university would want to compete on a level playing field with other universities by meeting this need for the foreign-trained expert: it makes economic sense. In this thinking, there remains the perception that the western university is better (more experienced and developed) than its Asian counterpart.

What are often lost in all of this are the local traditions and practices regarding learning. Such ideas have shaped the Asian education system for centuries through Buddhist, Confucian and other teachings. In the Asian university's apparent rush to post-modernity, or at least to catch up with the western university, such issues have been overlooked. The cultural and intellectual costs of this oversight have to be considered.

While a narrowly technocratic view prevails, such concerns are easily silenced by the charge that they are old fashioned or reactionary. The economic argument, in its immediacy, makes far more sense when the issue is one of survival in the era of free market competition across national borders. As developing countries or universities it makes sound sense for those in Asia to learn from other universities and hopefully adapt such lessons to the local context. No one except the most hardened Luddite would argue that western technology has no place in a developing country or business. And aren't the models being followed from the west simply forms of new technology?

But this may be a false dichotomy between technological progress and tradition. It is based on a view of education as a business which needs to adapt new developments in order to survive in the market. While such developments may be desirable, they need to be understood and applied wisely and carefully in ways that foster the continued development of local cultures and ideas.

A case in point is the fate of the Communicative Approach in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This approach developed in the UK was unquestioningly adopted by many Asian universities as the new magic bullet. Textbooks such as *Headway* sold in the millions (often pirated or photocopied). It took several years to understand that such an approach was unimplementable in its original design owing to the underdeveloped English language skills of most local teachers and the incompatible cultural assumption about the teaching and learning styles of the customers here. Few asked why a model developed basically for the Council of Europe to foster the learning of European languages by European students could and should be transferable to Asia. This naiveté was an understandable result of the view that as English is a European language it makes sense that the Europeans are the experts in teaching it. In other words, this oversight was part of the Native Speaker as Teacher fallacy still prevalent in Asia. The "foreign expert" has long had a prominent role in Asia as a giver of technical support and advice. Views of western innovations in educational techniques usually are subsumed under this response. Resistance to this model of language learning has developed over the past decade with the work of Phillipson, Pennycook and Canagarajah.

Now, new questions are being asked about the future of English. These questions may have been unthinkable when John Henry Newman set out his idea for the university in 1873. Then, no one was thinking of the possibility that the English language itself would be called into question as a result of the economic forces that were ensuring English and then American global influence. No one was then talking of World Englishes or English as an International Language, let alone English as a *Lingua Franca*. While much of the thinking in these areas remains theoretical or futurological, there may be implications not only for the shape of English but for the shape of the university in Asia in these debates. These implications stem from the question of the ownership of the language: Who, if anyone, owns the English language? If there is no privileged position in terms of this ownership any more, then the current model of academic development which places emphasis on exporting a particular western vision for the university in Asia also needs to be questioned.

The Old Guard, represented by writers such as John Honey, insists that there is still one standard to be followed: that of RP or correct English as it is defined by its usage in the metropolitan centres of the language in the west. But in what is often referred to as the Periphery, i.e. the rest of the world, in the sociolinguistic debates in the west, other questions need to be asked. Many of the issues that face the Asian university are raised in Post-Colonial Studies, largely a branch of literature studies, and concern the ways peoples excluded from the western centres define themselves and offer critiques of what is happening in the west. Much of this has to do with the rejection of the practices of the past few hundred years that have been used to tell the non-western person who he is and what he means.

Edward Said has dismantled much of this machinery by showing the racist and imperialist ideologies for what they are as tools to manufacture the image of the Orient and the Oriental. But what has not been made clear yet is the implication such ideologies have for the debate we are concerned with over the role of the university in Asia.

An argument may be made that these debates are actually not yet framed appropriately as they are predominantly defined and developed still by western academics or by Asian academics based in the west. To try to intervene in these issues by writing as a post-colonial, post-modern post-structuralist seems to be bound to the terms invented in the west, not to those on the ground where the theories are meant to have an impact. To better prepare for such dialogues, we need to break away from these old frameworks and try to set out non-western terms for the debate. If a true dialogue is to develop between the western and the Asian universities, then the Asian side of the dialogue needs to develop its own terms of reference, its own definitions.

While the Asian academic, educated in the west to think as a westernised academic, tries to find ways out of this labyrinthine trap only in terms of relating his critique in western terms, the debate will remain one-sided and short-sighted. The point is that a "post-colonial" still acts and thinks in terms of what he says he is not: a colonial. A "post-colonial" is still inherently a "colonial". As the immediate colonial past obviously is a force to be resisted, there may be more to the past than the current debates are willing to see. There may also be more to be said about the west than just to critique its moral *imperium* or the logic of its internal debates that are framed in Metropolitan terms. The problem for someone writing from the borders or outside, as one on the "Periphery" or margins, is that there is no place from which to criticize what is happening in these debates other than in the narrowly defined terms that have already marked its parameters as western. And that means there is lacking a self-defined vision of what the university means in specifically Asian social and cultural contexts.

Here the accepted image of the western university plays a crucial role in suppressing any critique or perception other than the one sanctioned by the apparently superior model of the western academic concept of the discourse. There is something inherently impossible about a project to define one's cultural and social meaning in terms of another culture's discourses. This is one of the lessons taught by Said that is too often forgotten. One reason for its being forgotten is the irony in Said's position as a western academic. His dialogue partners are also western academics and the issue remained one of deconstructing the western perception, not on enunciating other perceptions that are free of the need to begin with a critique of the western past. The issue that has yet to be addressed is more to do with the past of the peoples who remain locked within the western questions, a past that actually has little to do with the ways of thinking and seeing that frame the western debates. If one is to resist these ideologies, one first needs a sound sense of who one is and this sense needs to be free of the limitations imposed on that image by western racist and imperialist discourses.

Another way of making this point is to remind ourselves that there was life before this racism and imperialism. Instead of trying to think of only what came after or post the empires, one needs to look at what came before them. The strength, both cultural and logical, to define oneself comes from the reversing of time's arrow: instead of looking at the "after", look at the "before". Instead of "post-colonialism", rediscover the pre-colonial world. But not only as a specifically "pre" anything. The sources or roots of the issue lie in a past that needs to be rediscovered and examined in its own rights and terms, not in terms of the critical practices followed in the west. If and when such a past can be unearthed and defined in terms

that are free from the constrictions of a way of seeing that places emphatic stress only on what happens after the west comes in, then the Asian dialogue partners will have a position of strength from which to respond to the issues of living under western eyes. The logical point was made by William Blake when he saw that he needed his own system in order not to be a prisoner of another's system.

Does such knowledge exist, and if it does, how is it to be enunciated? That is the question that needs to be addressed by the writer who is concerned with finding a position of strength from which to join the debates over the idea of the university in Asia. In reality, these questions do not seem to be asked, at least not seriously, because the Asian academic remains trapped in the logic that comes with the models of a western university and all that model entails. It is understandable that for an Asian interlocutor, or at least for one trying to write outside the western view, not even from the "Periphery", there remains the most powerful force of the image of the western university as the source of light and success.

On the ground in Asia, there can be little argument that such an image accurately reflects the perceptions accepted by the vast majority of Asian academics, especially those with a stake in maintaining that image as a justification for their education received in a western university. While current thinking about the appropriateness of the model of a western university remains justified not in terms only of a theory of education but also in practical terms as a successful business model, any argument for a reconsideration of other models that may already exist in Asia will not attract a large audience. Why reinvent the wheel when the one you have already is successful? That is a hard argument to refute, if it is accurate.

But what if the image inculcated in Asia, that the western university model is the one-best way of doing things, is not the case? If in fact that model is broken, or at least breaking down, then the Asian academic will see the model is not what it claims to be; that it is more hyper than real: an illusion. Here, the point is one of rhetorical force. In Asia, the needed debates on what it means to be an Asian university will not be more fully developed unless and until the current ways of seeing the university model offered by the west as the only and therefore the best of all possible worlds are embarrassed or rejected.

The problem is that while the Asian academic or the writer working within a western model remains convinced that such a critique is unthinkable, given the need for internal consistency in the logic that sees such an argument made in the west actually confirms the validity of the model which espouses the self-critical spirit, then that writer will not feel the need to look elsewhere for ideas or ways of seeing what is what.

This way of defining the problem, however, is not the only way of thinking about the issue. A more pragmatic response is to point out: Look what is going to happen to you if you don't look to yourselves. If you want a university that works this way, then follow it; but if this way is unacceptable, then look for other sources of learning, teaching and researching; look to what you had before you adapted this model and see what can be resurrected from that past and used to express your own cultural identity and frame your debates in your own terms.

An optimist looking at the long term picture may respond that such changes will happen if indeed the western model finally breaks to such an extent that everyone can see it cannot work any more. While such a perspective seems to fit the Asian concept of time, it does not exclude the need to take action now by testing that model. The model can be tested in its claim to academic freedom and critique as essential ways of working. If the western dialogue partners are what they say they are, they will listen and change when the points being made are valid. But if such perceptions are excluded or silenced by the discourse, then the true nature of the iron heel that can only understand itself in terms of its self-image, and not its image as seen in Asia, will become visible. When the current one-way, top-down, communication model of how western and western trained academics talk to and about Asian academics and issues remains untested or unquestioned for too long, then the real possibility is that by the time that model breaks down the Asian university and its academics who have unquestioningly followed it will break down with it. And then, where will there be the space or the strength to look back at what has been done before and to give it new life? As Confucius (*Analects*: II, 11) asks: Where can we put our feet once the rites' order is destroyed?

Again, although many of these issues may be purely academic to many, we need to recognize that the facts of the ground do not necessarily fit into the current framework of the debate. It is to these facts that we should turn. The point is not only to interpret the world, but also to change it. Things change not only when we interpret them; they also often change despite our interpretations.

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In approaching any novel a reader brings questions. These questions change the novel, depending on the nature of the questions being asked. By looking at the campus novel in terms of what it has to say about the western university to a reader from outside the small world it represents, for a reader teaching English in post-colonial Asia, the questions turn the novel into a political fiction. What hope is there for the university represented in the novel

and what can be done to change things so that the world envisioned as the novel's dystopia does not further encroach on the reader's own world?

In terms of these concerns, Michael Wilding's novel *Academia Nuts* (2002) offers a voice that questions the facts, not as they are in marketing brochures but as they are on the ground in the western university (and in contemporary Asian universities insofar as they follow the western model). If the university is as Wilding represents it, then that image should be made visible to others, especially the Asian academic and prospective student who still unquestioningly believe that the way things are is the way things should be.

In *Academia Nuts*, Wilding relates the protagonist Henry Lancaster's struggles to write a novel about the university: a campus novel titled *Academic Theme Park*, as we learn in the last chapter. His idea for the novel is set in post-modern terms at first as he contemplates the possibility of writing a novel about not being able to write a novel:

> He tried everything. He tried the post-modern and wrote about not being able to write about it. The university. He had pages of writing about being unable to write about it. The university. He could put them all together and call them a novel. (8)

He thinks about the novelist's question of where it all went wrong for the university. His answer is that things started going wrong when sexual harassment regulations made it impossible for teachers to talk to students. "No one wanted to be seen within a hundred yards of a student" (8). Immediately, he starts to imagine the dry horrific post-Gothic world the teachers work in:

> And cut off from the young, the supply of fresh blood terminated, they became like dusty old Draculas, not even getting out of their coffin at night, just lying there inert amidst the post-Gothic of it all. (8)

At this point, the narrative impressionistically segues into the first of a series of vignettes or brief fictions that record the conversations between the members of the university's English Department that will comprise the rest of the novel until the final chapter where we learn that Henry Lancaster has written his novel, *Academic Theme Park*.

At the end of *Academia Nuts*, when Henry Lancaster's now completed and published novel *Academic Theme Park* has been held back by the Head of Department who refuses to send it to reviewers through the university's mailing system, Pawley comes up with his conspiracy theory that the Head of Department has suppressed the novel because the novel

has been taken off Henry's computer by the Vice-Chancellor who only read the title and thought that it was about the role of the university and published it under his own name as *New Idea of the University* (236).

Throughout Wilding's novel, Lancaster's writing of his novel has not been described in detail: we are not given any actual samples or instances of Henry Lancaster's writing since the beginning of the novel with his attempts to begin it. For all the reader knows, Henry's novel could still be on what Jack Lindsay used to refer to as the "never-never plan". As *Academic Theme Park* can be metamorphosed into a book titled *New Idea of the University*, so the novel written in the novel may be transformed into another novel titled *Academia Nuts*. But the title of the plagiarized work could mean that Wilding's novel is also his version of John Henry Newman's *The Idea of the University*. The similarities are there. Newman starts with the assumption that the university as it exists in the nineteenth century has lost its way; that it is no longer as it was first conceived in ancient Athens. He argues that the university should be:

> . . . the assemblage of strangers from all parts in one spot . . . for the communication and circulation of thought by means of personal intercourse. (Chapter 1)

In describing what he has in mind, Newman turns to examples of parliament and life in a metropolis which he tantalizingly refers to as "virtual Universities" (Chapter 1) in an echo of Balzac as much as an anticipation of Gorki. These are examples of what Newman terms "lived reality" (Chapter 1). We learn by dialogues and discussions as much as or more than we learn from reading books. It is in "the living voice" of the "Oral Tradition" (Chapter 1) that Newman sees the idea of the university.

In Wilding's emphasis on the spoken words, the recorded conversations, of the academics, there is a redeeming sense that they are trying to live the ideal academic life as envisioned by Newman. The circulation of ideas is there in the allusions that characterize the talk of Lancaster, Pawley and Dr Bee, the three main characters:

> "Well you can't say anyone's heard of the Dead Hand."
>
> "The Dead Hand" said the new chum, as if he might be gripped at the throat by it, or clamped into his chair by those mechanical arms so loved by the Jacobean dramatists no one read much any more.
>
> "Your boss," said Dr Bee.

"Yours too," said Lancaster.

"Just mine?"

"Ours then."

"The boss of all of us," said Dr Bee, "from who we radiate like the spokes of a wheel of fire."

"Wheel of fire?" said the new chum.

"Wilson Knight," said Lancaster.

"Shakespeare," said Dr Bee.

There is more happening in such conversation than just the banter of academics enjoying some verbal sparring by referring to literary works such as *Middlemarch* and *King Lear*, or to the critic Wilson Knight's book on Shakespeare's tragedies. They are recreating in their conversations the worlds of the books they love to read and discuss. And in so doing, they evoke the Gothic world of bondage Henry Lancaster has already feared that the university has turned into.

Many of the allusions in the novel refer to creative works that have affinities with horror literature. By saturating the novel with such references Wilding is evoking the horror felt by the creative Lancaster as he comes to terms with the university. This isn't done in a heavy-handed way. Often, the references are made by others, but the reader is meant to pick up on the train of thought in the sub-text. This comes out, for example, when Dr Bee is asked by the Head of Department why he is teaching his classes in the dark with the lights turned off. To Dr Bee's explanation that he thought he was being instructed to "[p]ut out the lights and then put out the lights" as a way of not seeing his students and so not looking at them in what could be construed as a lascivious way under the sexual harassment guidelines, the Head responds:

"Well put the lights back on."

"As you wish," said Dr Bee. "I was but a guide-dog trying to follow the guidelines. Dig out the sub-text."

"What sub-text?"

"The sub-text of the covering note. 'These are to be implemented. H.O.D.'"

"I sent that. There was no sub-text."

"I assumed you sent it," said Dr Bee. "Who else? I just followed the H.O.D."

> "Head of Department," said the Head of Department.
>
> "Oh," said Dr Bee.
>
> "What else could it mean?"
>
> "Well," he said, "obviously nothing. Nothing will come of nothing. It's just that in my shorthand H.O.D. has always stood for *Heart of Darkness*. Being in a Department of Literature, as it were." He beamed like an emissary of light. "I thought it was one of those coded instructions to save electricity and close your eyes." (30–31)

The humourless literalism of the Head's response, missing as she does the allusions to Conrad's Marlowe and refusing to think in terms of sub-text in anything outside of the "text" now being taught instead of works or books (as though there were no possible applications in the real world of what was being taught in the Department of English courses), reinforces by evoking the horror, the horror we are meant to feel as we are in this heart of darkness beyond the pale of light or enlightenment that is the English Department of the novel. Again, there is the reference to Shakespeare's tragedies; this time it is King Lear's response to Cordelia that nothing will come of nothing and to Macbeth's putting out the light. The pattern is there. It builds an impression of how the creative academic fails to communicate with the bureaucracy which is refusing to join in on the trains of thought inspired by the novels being taught about in the university. There is a disconnect between the content and the form of things. Everything is meant to be so business-like and efficient that there is no room for humour, creativity or play. The pattern of other faculty members missing these allusions suggests that the charge made by Dr Bee earlier that no one reads books any more (8) may well be true. The university in the novel is likened to the uncivilized world imagined by Conrad. This theme is one of the novel's sub-texts.

Another sub-text is the function of literature in the modern world. Pawley and Dr Bee challenge Henry Lancaster on why he is trying to write a campus novel:

> "Don't you feel that by the time you come to publish it, the campus novel will be something from a vanished era?" said Pawley.
> "No," said Henry.
> "With the universities degraded and destroyed, what sense will there be in a university novel?"
> "What sense was there ever?" asked Dr Bee.

"A dead form," Pawley went on.

"The great forms of the past didn't deal only with the present," said Henry. "Take the epic."

"Surely modesty forbids," said Dr Bee.

"Homer wasn't writing about the contemporary."

"The fall of Troy. The end of civilisation. Yes," said Henry.

"Or *Paradise Lost*," Dr Bee added. "The loss of innocence."

"Absolutely."

"A small thing but your own."

"It won't be that small," said Henry.

"It will contain multitudes, no doubt," said Dr Bee.

"Yes."

"And what will you put in it?" asked Dr Bee.

"In it?"

"What inseparable content would you find for the classic form?"

"This," said Henry. "All this."

There it was. Their world lay all before them.

The deserted common room. The chipped cups, the worn unfigured carpet. (17–18)

Here, the themes of the novel are being suggested. How it fits the traditions of Milton, Homer, Conrad and Shakespeare may seem to be too much of a stretch for Dr Bee, but the ideas are there: the mock-epic of Pope is conjured up in the detritus of the English Department's empty spaces side by side with the ending of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the beginning of Wordsworth's *Prelude*. The epic theme of the fall, the decline of civilization. That is the question. Dr Bee's idea that Henry's novel has a "small" content also suggests David Lodge's *Small World*, another work in the campus novel sub-genre. There are numerous levels to the text which need to be de-coded as sub-text by a literate reader who, by so doing, joins the ranks of those characters who are interested in the humorous, imaginative and creative responses of the characters who are a dying breed in English Departments: those who actually read and understand, and sometimes can even write the literature being taught in the university. The absence of such a spirit is hinted at in yet another allusion—this time to Henry James' story "The Figure in the Carpet"—suggesting that such a rich tapestry as that offered to James is missing from the world Lancaster is forced to live in now with its "worn unfigured carpet".

These references to the traditions of literature are preparing the tapestry of the narrative for the novel's final, ultimate allusion when Wilding invokes Newman's arguments. This is not a parting shot or afterthought; it has been carefully prepared for throughout the novel by the arguments Henry makes and the themes he announces for his novel, the one that may be being transformed into Wilding's *Academia Nuts*. That Lancaster is given the same Christian name as Newman reinforces this pattern of sub-text.

The novel is possibly transformed into a bureaucratic-academic non-fictional book. The point being made is that Henry's novel has been sucked into the very world it was meant to resist:

> I write a novel about the place. But reality outstrips the worst I could possibly come up with. Who could think that a Head of Department could be so petty and vindictive? Who could think that the Faculty club would be closed down? Who could imagine that a Vice-Chancellor could be charged with plagiarism? Put it in a novel and no one would believe you. It's so unfair. (231)

Pawley's reading of Henry's fate is: "Reality, as it is so called, has superseded fiction" (231). The dangerous relationship between fact and fiction, the one encouraged by Henry, Pawley and Dr Bee in their creative word-play throughout the novel, the one that is missed by the deadwood academics who don't read creative books but only write about them in meta-critical and hyperreal ways, remains problematical, open-ended. In their disengagement from reality, academics (the bureaucrazy ones) no longer seem to be able to recognize a novel when they see one. Why? Because they don't read novels (or any other books for that matter) any more, and because the world they have invented is now one in which there are no more novels or fictions but bureaucratic fabrications, no more literary images but marketing images, no more allusions but lost illusions, and no university crest but a business logo.

In the increasingly hyperreal world of the fictional university, this labyrinthine series of metamorphoses raises the issue of a fictional work being factual in a post-modern sense: fiction becomes fact as facts become fictions. An echo of Magic Realism is there in the countenancing of this double world; it is picked up in Pawley's Thompsonesque drug-induced sense of how things are turning "weird" (222) as he searches for a copy of a book by the Elizabethan magus John Dee in the library to help his ex-teacher Harbinger with some research; there may be alternatives to the apparent defeat of Lancaster and his dreams of what a university should be. While the university seems to generate more than one simulated

response after another as a way of bamboozling the writer, Magic Realism counters with the possibility of there being more than one reality that can be created. If we are to resist the empire of the sign without significance, we need to create not more such signs but realities. We need to do things about what is happening . . . not just talk about the words.

The hybridization of the book, (a lesson perhaps from Marquez or Rushdie or London or Lawrence), is part of Wilding's use of post-modern themes and techniques which bring out the hyperreality of the world he represents. Hyperness is a product of the university going off the rails: the loss of contact between lecturers and students which forces the academic to live in a strange world cut off from meaningful contact with the real life of the university as it was meant to be. Without students to interact with, the teachers at the unnamed and therefore generically bland university have only themselves to talk to. And by and large, as Wilding shows, these teachers have little interest in or love of the subject they teach. In place of the books they should be reading as creative works, they have built their Theory and the "texts" which are devoid of the stuff of life, the actual work of a creative writer and his work.

In this world, we see no actual teaching or learning. What we do hear of is a student complaining to the harassment tribunal that Professor Rowley refuses to have sexual relations with her any more; another student who wrote of her life as a prostitute in a creative writing class assignment; and an ex-student who is probably a spy for the US military. All the other conversations take place between faculty members in the common room, the cafeteria, a restaurant off campus, or in offices. None of these conversations are actually very professional, if by "professional" is meant the issues of what to teach and how to teach it. Instead, the conversations revolve around surviving in the bureaucratic quagmire of departmental politics. This is understandable given the management model followed in the novel's Department of English and university.

By ending the novel at this low point, where Lancaster is silenced by the machinery of the bureaucratic bean-counters, Wilding is not being pessimistic; he is leaving things unresolved and open. The narrative, with its impressionistic paths and segues, makes the ending seem natural. To have ended the novel with a resolution or victory would have been to impose an alien order on the way events occur in the novel's world. The novelist is leaving much to the reader to consider. How to respond to the challenges of the novel is the point.

*

To bring together the previous two parts of this essay: the issue should not only be what the university was or once again may be, but what it is. John Henry Newman's critique and solution, powerful as they are, don't seem to be enough. Wilding's real academics do what

Newman suggests as they discuss things in a convivial atmosphere and try to put their world together, to make sense of it all. But they fail. They fail because the university they critique has moved off the plane of the real and onto a level of hyperreality that has no connection with the real world or the subjects, the creative works, it was meant to study. There are no relationships between the teachers and the students; nor are the majority of the teachers real academics. Instead, they are theorists of theory, tautological opportunists who freely plagiarise without actually reading what they copy.

The world of *Academia Nuts* cannot be a model that a person who subscribes to Newman's values would want to imitate or copy or import into other universities which are still looking for ways of making themselves into "real" universities to be validated by the degree to which they resemble the western university model. It would be "nuts" to do so.

We need to interpret the image of the university as that image is in the real world by finding other voices of those who express a deep concern for that image's fate and recognize the dangers of such models. One such voice is that of Jean Baudrillard who in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) saw the university as a "spiraling cadaver" (149) which produced a "liquidation of culture and knowledge" (151). In Baudrillard's Paris, the students resent receiving degrees without having to do any work, without learning anything because they have no teachers to dialogue with. This is more than just a spectre haunting Europe; it is what has already happened in the west. The Gothic overtones are not incidental. The world seen is a nightmare that has engulfed the western university for Baudrillard:

> The situation only appears to be new. It is so for those who still think that a real process of work takes place in the university, and who invest their lived experience, their neuroses, their *raison d'être* in it. The exchange of signs (of knowledge, of culture) in the university, between "teachers" and "taught" has for some time been nothing but a doubled collusion of bitterness and indifference (the indifference of signs that bring with it the disaffection of human and social relations), a doubled simulacrum of a psychodrama (that of a demand hot with shame, presence, oedipal exchange, with *pedagogical incest* that strives to substitute itself for the lost exchange of work and knowledge). In this sense the university remains the site of a *desperate initiation to the empty form of value*, and those who have lived there for the past few years are familiar with this strange work, the true desperation of nonwork, of nonknowledge. Because current generations still dream of reading, of learning, of

> competing, but their heart isn't in it—as a whole, the ascetic cultural mentality has run body and possessions together. (155–156)

Is this situation in Paris all that different to the world in Wilding's fictional university? For Baudrillard, the only solution or way out is to wait for the university's edifice to come falling down under the weight of its emptiness and delusion: "the total collapse and slippage of the terrain, which remains our most foolish hope" (157). The foolishness of the hope needs to be understood. It is not silly, but a form of what in the Renaissance was seen by Erasmus and others as the only sane way of dealing with a crazy world out of control. It's an echo of Tertullian's *credo quia absurdum* as much as it is a revoicing of Albert Camus' arguments for an absurdist response to the world that has become untenable in its present state. Wilding's reliance on humour and wit evoke the voices of Shakespearean fools and a long line of others who have used such weapons against their foes: he is not alone in his vision. Through the many literary allusions in his novel, he suggests that we need to look within the books we are meant to be reading and teaching to find what we have lost: the actual words and thoughts of those who have something meaningful to say about the language of literature, those who really could use that language to write creatively.

These voices need to be heard so as to overcome the feeling of isolation or even of alienation that the concerned academic may be feeling in the world where the simulacrum has taken over. While such experience may be "unfair", as Lancaster complains, we need to embrace that unfairness and do something about it. We need engagement, commitment, action. Baudrillard is wrong to wait for the simulacra to collapse. Such defeatism won't do. He seems to have realized this in his *The Intelligence of Evil, or The Lucidity Pact* (2005) where he argues that we can bring this façade down by willing it to be otherwise, by using our imagination to see things are different: to believe because it is absurd to believe.

This folly, understood as furore or madness in the Renaissance and in Socratic Athens, may explain Wilding's own, and his Lancastrian double's, schizophrenic personae as academics who write novels. Such characterizations are themselves understandable as Gothic responses, a theme Wilding has developed throughout the novel. In this image, there is the debate over the post-colonial experience and the Magic Realist novel (as well as the whole other issue of the doubleness of the other "post" thinking in "post-modernism" and "post-structuralism").

This is where the concerns of Wilding, Baudrillard and others need to be studied as adumbrations of what may be waiting for the Asian university that wants to be a clone of the

western disintegrating university. In Asia, recent developments of TEFL along the lines of post-colonial critiques of the teaching English as a foreign language enterprise are starting to doubt the current hegemonic models of teaching and learning. These doubts need to be much more developed and solutions need to be found by reshaping the ways we think, talk and teach in English Departments in Asia.

There are signs that others are already thinking about these issues here in Asia. Pira Sudham, in his novel *The Force of Karma* (2002), seemingly rescues Wilding by transplanting him to Oxford as a teacher called Michael Wild who advocates a ruthless critique of all thinking as the only honest way of responding to art and its problems. (This is what George Lukács calls critical realism, a misunderstood term no longer in fashion after Macherey's and Eagelton's refusals to come to terms with Hegelian criticism. But that's another story.) The point is that Sudham, as a political novelist, understands that the fight needs to be carried on not only on the ground but also in the novel itself. Such responses are admirable and need to be developed by others through critiques of such novels as well as by the writing of more of them. Novels, like empires, can write back against the cadaverous world of academe that has shunned them and has refused to give them the respect they deserve as works of art, and not just as lifeless corpses called "texts". By reviving the art of literary criticism in order to respond to such novels, we can move away from the Theory-driven simulacra that have proven to be so hostile to art as art in the study of English since the 1970s.

Can this be done in the university as envisaged by Wilding, Baudrillard and Sudham? That actually is not the question, as those universities seem to be more like the Undead of Bram Stoker than the vibrant hubs dreamed of by Newman. But . . . the university in Asia still has time to rethink its models and image. Because the whole enterprise of cloning the west in the east, of turning the east into a pale imitation of the west, has not yet been successful there is still the foolish hope that we can do something about all this. We can put the novel and the academic critique back together again, much as Victor Frankenstein puts together his new Adam, to create our own Gothic responses to the post-Gothic nightmare that seems to be the western university.

Pragmatic actions can also be taken:

1. Set *Academia Nuts* as required reading in some of our English courses.
2. Don't leave the characters of that novel stranded in their own world as defeated students and creators of literature.

3. Give the students, who have been marginalized in the nightmare university Lancaster has to live in, their voices back as they are asked to respond to the novel in real class and in real essays.

4. Write more novels, following the examples of Michael Wilding and Pira Sudham, to reclaim the territory of fiction.

5. Put the creativity and the living voice called for by Newman, Baudrillard and Wilding back into our courses and journals.

6. Learn how to live in the post-Gothic world instead of in the post-colonial world of our past nightmares.

7. Laugh at, mock, satirise, ridicule our academic vanities.

Such actions or interventions are needed; not the anaemic responses being advocated by the western exporters of education models for Asian universities.

If Asian universities continue to try to imitate a particular model of a western university (the spiralling cadavers of Baudrillard and the post-Gothic nightmare abbeys of Wilding's crumbling university), a model which does not exist anymore in reality (if, as Newman suggests, it ever did in modern Europe), then our universities are generating a dangerous simulacrum—a model of a non-existent reality.

This fantasy totters on the brink of what orientalism did when its ideologues invented an imaginary model of an orient that had no reality until it was believed by the west and created out of the delusion. These models, seen for what they are as sources of racist, imperialist ideology, seem strange tools for the victims of this ideology to adopt or adapt in their rush to be like the west in order to gain validity as real universities. Such hyperreal remedies or quick-fix solutions to catch up as developing countries seem inevitably to lead to a totalizing world using and being used by the simulacrum. To build an apparently real world based on this imported failed thinking is to move into a hyperspace where the desired reality exists only as a pale and lifeless imitation devoid of any actual desired energy (the energy falsely promised by the model)— the real energy real universities need if they are to make a real difference in Asia and not be cloned copies of dead or dying things.

Are there alternatives? Yes . . . if we can reject the proffered dream of imitation that advocates a model that even in simulacral form appears to be already rotten at the core.

This is not a question of moving beyond the post-modern forces that seem to revel in such CGI thinking, but of seeing through them and turning them to our own advantage, much as Wilding teaches us to do in his novel's detourning (a situationist term) of the techniques of

post-modern writing, to see that these western versions of the academic world and university are not really what they are cracked up to be in the currently held dominant image of the western university. Then we may turn our gaze elsewhere, within, to see whether there may be other ways of doing things. To look within, to recognize that there may still be vestiges of other ways (or Taoist / Buddhist / Confucian Ways)— ways that have survived in the underground streams so as to avoid the ravages produced by the onslaught of pale imitations for their own sake, and of models that more and more resemble death masks that have beguiled us all for far too long.

Models may be there. Not as simulations but as historical and philological enquiries into what the Buddhists call the what's what that was there before the illusion was generated out of nothing, models that still have values if one approaches them through a humanistic hermeneutic that focuses on what is actually happening on the ground of the Asian university and not on what is happening in the mirages from a desert wilderness of a moribund academe that offers no hope for life, but only wants to feed off the blood of its victims that it makes from its own failures.

In place of a mass reproduction of now meaningless models (signifiers without signifieds, insignificant pseudo-signs) that want all to be stamped with a Quality Assurance logo in place of the real thing (an actual education in the humanistic traditions), we need to embrace variety, critical openness and even the folly of the great souls who have been our teachers in the past; things that are becoming less and less thinkable in any global village created out of advertising slogans, marketing ploys and misreadings of Marshal McLuhan which advocate an "international" real education masquerading as a western one. For there to be an international education, Asia and the rest of the post-colonial world, need to have their own voices and visions to communicate with the west as equal dialogue partners instead of as dependency aid recipients who have their questions answered by the west. To be clones of such seductive images of the one-best-way or the short cut to "development" has to be questioned. We need other conceptions of what we want and think if we are to retain any independence in order to have room in which to think.

Otherwise, the reality we ignore will ensnare us, as it does Wilding's characters and Baudrillard's university, while we are distracted by looking elsewhere than within for answers to meaningless questions asked by others who don't want to hear our answers anyway. We need to ask our own questions. And that is the gift of critical thinking which is not predetermined by abstractly ideological Theory that has contributed to, if not manufactured, the spiralling cadavers of western English Departments. We may be doing

ourselves wrong to take these cadavers out of their graves. The point is not to theorize the world but to change it.

A Literary Alchemist: The Many Worlds of Michael Wilding (A Fragment from a Study of His Writings)

Last Days

Looking backwards over the vast expanses of literary and literal time and space in Michael Wilding's world, the hopes and fears he foreshadowed in his early work as a literary critic, academic teacher, creative writer, and publisher seem to have come true. His warnings (predictions, fears) may have been realized as the university, publishing, creative arts, political freedoms have all disappeared or crumbled . . . The world that has been emerging since the end of the wildly halcyon days of the 1960s' freedoms has been eroded with the advent of a hyper-world filled with the state apparatus' technologies of surveillance and internal repression through self-induced fears and doubts.

Against this post-apocalypse of sorts, Wilding's work offers alternative visions that keep the beasts at bay. From his earliest stories collected in *The West Midland Underground*, there has been an openness or willingness to offer alternative ideas as possible choices of interpretation as much as they also embody or prefigure alternative lifestyles or sociopolitical realities. The eponymous story begins:

> The West Midland Underground goes from . . . to . . . Or should I have said went? Should I be saying went? Or even will go? May go. Could go. (Wilding, 1975: 1)

Again looking backwards, this time from the particular vantage point of *In the Valley of the Weed* (2017), his latest novel to be published, but not the last one written, Fullalove (one of the two aspects of Wilding's grotesquely shaped researcher-protagonists in the novel . . . both may have an unnamed—at least in this novel—first name of "Michael" as they are so close to the author, although Wilding states that Plant's first name is Keith, pronounced "Kif", in personal correspondence) seems to have a copy of this early work stored somewhere in his hovel or mind, as he warns or cautions his other half, the apparent (anti)hero of the novel and of the other four so-far published novels in the series, Plant: "Answers are unimportant. It's the questions that matter." (Wilding, 2017: 55)

Across the years and the spaces of many other works of fiction and non-fiction, it seems at least serendipitous that such an echo (a double voice) is possible in Wilding's oeuvre; it is as if there is an underground stream connecting these two times or works.

Bringing together two or more works the connection between which may seem tenuous at first glance is how any grotesquerie, even a literary critical one such as this, is created. In this spirit, the form or methodology of this study may also surprise some readers with the texts that are put into contiguous relationships. Surprising collocations are another way of understanding the linguistics of alchemy that brings together elements or chemicals to provoke a reaction that would produce "gold" or interesting readings.

Such connections are characteristic of Wilding's worlds. He records that one of his original stimuli to write fiction was the "desolate wasteland" of the Midlands, and that this desolation is compensated for by romantic visions to shore against the otherwise desolate world and make the composite world liveable in. This drive or need for imaginative shaping of the environment in order to create a living space is a major ecological thematic concern of his works, as, for example, can be seen in *Living Together* (1974), *Scenic Drive* (1976), *Pacific Highway* (1982), and also in his *The Paraguayan Experiment* (1985), the documentary experimental fiction of William Lane's attempt to set up a utopian space away from the failed Shearer's Strike aftermath in Queensland back in the 1890s.

By combining, as in a Llullian *Ars Combinatoria* technique, various aspects or parts of his life into new shapes, Wilding has been trying to generate alternative versions of what we have been told to accept, to use a phrase from William Golding's fragmentary incomplete or posthumous novel set at Delphi, *The Double Tongue* (1995) as our sad homogeneous world. This tactic harks back to the surrealist worlds of Edward Upward where the committed fictions of that writer are attempts to change the physical spaces of the English scenes that that writer found so politically and socially oppressive. Such a leap should not come as a surprise when we remember that both Wilding and Upward were forerunners of New Writing movements that were grounded in leftist political terms. This link is yet another underground stream I am seeking in this study that disembogues to my past (as he served as my surrogate supervisor for my thesis on Morris, Tressell, and Upward) as much as it does to Wilding's or any other reader's. At least it may be argued that Wilding, like Lane, and like the three seemingly doomed giants of nineteenth-century Australian literature, Clarke, Gordon, and Kendall, recreated (saved) in documentary facts in *Wild Bleak Bohemia* (2014), is threading together a group of dissident or non-conformist thinkers and writers who sought to renovate or reshape the social spaces around them. This theme runs throughout Wilding's academic studies, and is particularly prominent in his *Dragons Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution* (1987) and *Social Visions* (1993).

Don Graham senses this seemingly magical double space in Wilding's visionary world in reference mainly to *The West Midland Underground* when he suggests about the presence of the conflicts or shifts or changes in Wilding's ways:

> There are enough of these stories in the corpus of Wilding's work, in this volume and in other collections, to constitute a kind of shadow novel of a young man from the provinces. (Graham, 2013: 85)

By bringing together or separating aspects (fragments) of ourselves, we create a variety of personas or voices that make it difficult for any surveillance or control police to capture or pin us down. There is also strength in numbers (pun maybe intended) when those seeking sanctuary in the weeds are in solidarity . . . of sorts. The tactic echoes Robert Graves' Roebuck that leads the researcher who is trying to decode the myths of poetic creation on a hermeneutic pursuit or quest through the thicket of hints by changing its shape, morphing into other entities to hide its triple nature as the White Goddess: any case brought against Wilding for literary-political "crimes" would need an academic reader steeped in the lore of hermeticism, mnemonics, and hermeneutics beyond the grasp of anyone in academe now . . . at least in the academic world shadowed by Wilding in his creative and journalistic writings . . . especially, the apparently fake academics of the labyrinth who are now under observation as we continue our morph into an emic, insider's, perspective in pursuit of Wilding the Roebuck and start our katabatic descent into the perhaps teleological Patmos world of the 23rd Psalm or the Valley of the Kings . . . mythic death is the shadow in either case, as seems appropriate for a crime / murder / spy / mystery fiction.

Only by digging deeply into the text and its language can a reader hope to unearth the secrets hidden within Wilding's work. The rope (Ariadne's thread) or metaphor for this undertaking could be, or not, the twinning of Dr Dee and Edward Kelly in Wilding's study of hermetic ideas (Wilding, 1999) that forms the heart of the labyrinth that I am trying to perform an exegesis on in this study. While Dr Dee with his doomed magnificent library may be the writer studied, the medium and perhaps charlatanesque figure (at least according to Francis Yates) Edward Kelly would be the critic or reader of Wilding's / Dr Dee's magical books. The idea of the critic as a medium who séances a novelist or poet is an argument more fully set out in a forthcoming book on the hermetic arts and literature that I am writing in terms of a suggested reform of the educational framework of the humanities that have been

destroyed in too many instances. “From the beginning it is a world of doubles” (Wilding, 1999: 2).

Looking Backwards

This directional reference is also the title of Edward Bellamy’s utopian novel, and the opening words of Jack London’s dystopian novel *The Iron Heel*, that Wilding has written on in *Political Fictions* (1980). Again, the doubling or grotesqueing of the utopian with the dystopian is in tune with Wilding’s double visions that see many kaleidoscopic sides to political realities.

Writing in the immediacy of the moment, the Roebuck has arisen. So, I follow where it leads in the chase that turns this writing into a mirror form of the grotesque I feel is needed to perceive and represent (scrying) the spirit of Wilding’s art . . . in its metamorphic forms as academic and creative life is fused not only in the novel or criticism, but in the life of the writer. We read the text to divine or decipher its hermetic meanings, or to communicate through a medium with the spirit world or the writer’s voice hidden or buried in the art work. The alchemical fusion is the source of the magic Wilding practices. This is the power that needs to be brought out in a critical study of his world as it may be a solution to the problematic of the current malaise in the academic theme park we all too unwittingly seem to have accepted. (I have tried to read this hyper-real world of postmodern catastrophe in Conlon: 2007.)

To bring disparate threads together, here is another voice:

> And indeed, there is no greater folly than to be very inquisitive and laborious to find out the causes of such a Phenomenon as never had any existence, and therefore Men ought to be cautious and to be fully assured of the truth of the effect before they adventure to explore the cause. (Webster, 1677: 251)

To start again from a wide angle in the historical records: the epigraph just misplaced here comes from a book that counseled skepticism towards witchcraft. The writer is better known as the author of another perhaps quite different text, *Academiarum Examen* (1654) on reforming the curriculum of the universities. John Webster was an alchemist who felt the need to suggest remedies for the ills of his times, and to do so in the voice of reason. Such an apparently double life of a person (Webster or Wilding . . . or Dee and Kelly as secret agents, hermeticists, academic scientists, alchemists) interested in a rational approach to witchcraft

and the reform of a university system dying under the weight of outmoded practices may seem strange to a new student of English literature (if such an 'episteme' still exists after Foucault and other poststructuralist refashioners), or of magic, or of political philosophy. But if the student has been reading Michael Wilding's academic and creative works that have been published since the late 1960s, such a grotesque mixing of voices and roles will not seem strange. Nor will the specific themes or threads that Webster spins out in his works. What connects Wilding and Webster is their interest in alchemy and in educational reforms.

In the Preface to his most recent autobiographical work, Wilding could be (mis)read as unconsciously channelling Webster when he observes of himself, the himself when he was fifteen years old and writing in a diary that he is reading again many decades later, looking for material, as it turns out unsuccessfully, that may be transmuted into a novel:

> But on one page there was a doodle of a map of Australia. It dated from when I was fifteen. Beneath the map was a note. "I seem to have drawn a map of Australia. Why is that? Does that mean I am going there or something?"
>
> So I can claim a sort of Australianness as well as Englishness. Though it is often hard to say where anyone ultimately comes from, once you start looking into things. (Wilding, 2016: ix)

The foreshadowing of his move to Australia, recognized as a prefigural prescience, is presented as what will later become a central theme in Wilding's works: the grotesque doubling of identities, meanings, roles, actions with a tone that could be read as ambiguously mystical.

To study the ways Wilding's various works morph as his life develops is a daunting undertaking, given that between that diary entry and his most recent work, six decades have elapsed. To follow the threads and traces that lead from that diary entry up to the present is to encounter the writer in an autobiographical space that dwarfs that of Proust or Joyce, who died quite young and so had a more manageable memory space than Wilding to shape or reshape.[1] Wilding is explicit about how he has stored his memories, perhaps encoded or disguised them, for later use when he explains his exclusion of the fictional material from his *Growing Wild*: "Much of the fiction I have written has been autobiographical. I have tried not to duplicate that material here, though once in a while, I quote from it" (Wilding, 2016: xiii).

The last words in Michael Wilding's last or most recently published novel *In the Valley of the Weed* (2016) . . . *Little Demon* (2018) being written before but published later

. . . allude to a number of themes that evoke echoes of others' fiction as well as of more literary critical fictions (theories). The detective Plant has realized that he has been placed into a (perhaps Batesonian, see Bateson, 2000, 201–222) double bind by a woman who hired him to solve the mystery of her husband's disappearance. After confessing and then retracting or hedging her confession of her involvement in the death of her husband, a disgraced academic whose compromising emails were published, the ecclesiastically named Mrs. Vicars (Kate) makes a pass at Plant who has perhaps been implicated in covering up her apparent crime by researching or investigating the disappearance:

> She reached up and let down her hair. It cascaded around her neck and down to her shoulders like the Reichenbach fall, framing her there as she lunged forward and wrapped her arms around him and drew him towards her and kissed him full on the lips, her tongue pressing hard into his mouth. (Wilding, 2016: 276)

This is the first time the reader sees Plant engaging in any sexual play, not just in this novel, but in any of the Plant series, at least up to now. In a reversal of the stereotypical aggressive male in detective stories, the kind of role that raises the hair or hackles of politically correct critics both within the novel and in the world outside, the woman is the actor or agent in the action. We do not know how Plant will respond to this intertwining with a client who has seemingly confessed and threatened him with violence if he exposes her. He is in a fix or double bind and in a spiralling embrace that is hinted at in the allusion to the Conan Doyle story where Holmes and Moriarty apparently plummet to their ends over the Reichenbach Falls or Fall. In Wilding's version, the fall is singular and in lower case . . . hinting at Plant's physical and / or spiritual (or Miltonic) fall into crime or sexual experience. Other words, seemingly innocuous, echo with double meanings as we remember that she has just framed Plant.

There still may be critics who will insist on misreading Plant's actions as misogynistic and transgressive. Wilding's inversion of the act is not an avoidance of the issue; it restates the theme of Mr. Vicars' fall from grace at Sydney University for using perhaps similar politically incorrect language in private emails. The stereotype of the aggressive detective dominating the femme is reversed or turned inside out in a gesture of "negative incapability", a phrase used by several characters in the novel that echoes and turns Keats' theory on its head as a statement of an uncertainty principle where all guesses are hedges and subject to being negated or subverted. The failure of the plot to lead to action, the frustrations produced

by paranoia and fear that keep radicals passive, are the point in this novel where a not-really-a-detective searches for a not-really-an-academic for a friend who may not-really-be-a-friend who may want to help a woman who may-not-really-be-the-good-wife of a person who may-not-really-be-an-academic who may not-really-have-disappeared or committed suicide or been murdered or had an accident. The reader, like the detectives, is cast into a hallucinogenic trance state, like a medium, that suggests the 1960s buzz word for a wild great experience: "unreal".

Writing is a dangerous act in Wilding's world, as is reading. Such a view may seem odd for an Emeritus Professor of English and Australian Literature. However, if one dares to read Wilding's own published record of what has sometimes been banned or ignored by those in power, especially if someone is invested in the academic or literary types of career that Wilding satirizes in his fiction and confronts in other ways in his more "academic" works, then the reader will be faced with a committed message that will require a response.

The threat of dangerous ideas, words, works, is a recurring motif in *In the Valley of the Weed*, where the central but absent character (not necessarily in the Machereyan sense) is a disappeared academic whose body and death are discovered only after thirteen chapters. Tim Vicars has been dismissed from his university for using politically incorrect language in personal emails sent through the university's server. But, in the multi-threaded world of a Wilding plot, the cause of his problems may have been his research into freedom of the internet or into the drug counter-culture, which in turn may have been subsumed by his affairs with various women along the way. Any or all of these threads could explain his wife's admission and palinode or ambiguation of her act when she hints that she or an unspecified "we" disposed of her husband for political or ideological reasons. These shifts or metamorphoses in narrative and in its interpretive threads lead to the researcher and failed academic Plant's fall at the end of the novel into the femme's arms and / or into complicity in the crime he was hired to investigate.

The double, duplicitous, ambiguous, hypocritical (grotesque) life led by Vicars echoes or mirrors aspects of Wilding's own life as an academic writing about drugs and the dark surveillance state that looms around us. But, unlike Vicars, and various victims in Wilding's other fictions, Wilding has learned how to survive amidst the ambiguities and betrayals that characterize his worlds as an academic, publisher, novelist, and activist. How he has managed to survive in this hostile environment is a lesson that Wilding the teacher passes along to his student readers in this, as in his other creative works. But it would be wrong to separate these works from his other writings, as his hinted at mixing of modes quoted above makes clear.

Understanding this aspect of Wilding's approaches to thinking, acting, and writing, is the aim of this essay which seeks to reconcile the academic and the creative sides of Wilding, the fusion of which is the secret to his success as an academic and as a novelist with the gift of double or second sight.

The horns of the dilemma Plant is confronted with by Kate Vicars are ethical questions that Wilding leaves open. (Again, it is the question that is important, not the answer.) Should he expose what he thinks may be her complicity in her husband's death, or should he succumb to her sexual advances that would lead to the punishment of any male making such advances in practice? This scenario shadows the one her husband was placed in when he chose to write sexist, racist, and homophobic words in his private emails on a public server . . . or at least that was the line given by his employers and those who "exposed" him. The two situations (one practical, the other theoretical, or one in words with the other in deeds) are meant to be placed together by the reader. Depending on the reader's own ethical choices, the meaning of the novel will anamorphically change. This should not come as a surprise to a Bakhtinian student of the Novel. Our own point-of-view shapes how we interpret what we see in fiction. (The term is Henry James's, the writer Wilding edited for his first book. See Wilding, 1967.) However, in an age where dogmatic judgments seem to characterize politically correct academic studies, the ability to remain open to different views is problematic. Our blindness or deafness to other voices creates dangers for a novelist such as Wilding who wishes to push the boundaries of literary spaces and what we can say and do in those spaces. Such writing in its esoteric shapes may be in danger of suffering from the ultimate conspiracy: that of silence. Some of this oversight may be due to critics' blindness to the idea that Low (in the diglossic sense as much as in the genreric, Fryean sense) where we are taught not to expect or to look for any deep ideas hidden or buried in such writers.

The choices faced by Plant in this ending scene mirror other issues that may be raised in relation to a wider reading of Wilding's views about the surveillance state placed into the voices of several of his characters. My point links back to an earlier one I made in this essay about the reader being a scryer who channels the writer's vision through the language or medium of the text (tablet, stone, Ouija board, cups, entrails, threads). The Pythia reader or critic receives the writer's spirit's god's words in a state of *enthusiasmos*, the significance of which should be clear to a lover of literature (especially one schooled in the visionary ideas of Giordano Bruno and the heroic frenzies or *furores*). She, the Pythia, experiences this in the *adyton* space underground. This underground is the text of the novel, its inner space.

These references to mythic acts and sacred rituals are the central theme of this study. The pursuit of truth is difficult. To survive the negative capability of uncertainty is a skill of any writer, critic, reader, or student of literature. Without this skill, we are prone to the trap fallen into by Plant:

> He didn't believe Bess. He didn't know what Kate was capable of. It all gave him an uneasy feeling. Corrosive doubt. Disabling anxiety. Negative incapability. (Wilding, 2017: 172)

The pun on Keats' term (an allusion or shadow world that is warned against by several characters in the novel who want all references spelt out to avoid any bogus charges of plagiarism made by the new Philistines that comprise the Illiterati of academe) should alert a reader to the advantages of being familiar with and conversant in literary criticism and experience, as the ability to exist amidst such doubts is (or was) one of the advantages of such an education. However, as we know from Wilding's campus fictions and other writings, that education may itself be under threat from neo-liberal reformers and grasping opportunists who don't read books much anymore, yet insist on lecturing about them. If this sounds like the kind of paranoia Wilding's critics often charge him with, then we need to remember that such responses are vital to a student or writer of the grotesqueries we find comprising the bodies of many Gothic texts:

> . . . it seems to me impossible to make much sense out of the Gothic fiction without continual recourse to the concept of paranoia. (Punter, 2013: 183)

Hermeneutic lessons are required. So is a breadth and depth of reading experiences. We need more teachers. If those in academe are unwilling or incapable of doing this, then the novelist must take over the role of educating the students . . . if they can be enticed into reading fiction and not just hyper- or meta-texts on those books. While high theory may have replaced the old creative writing in terms of offering imaginative combinations of ideas from several different perspectives meshed together into a theoretical grotesque, the novelist needs to reclaim the title of creative thinker by bringing back ideas and content to the novel. One way of doing this is to incorporate essays, articles, other texts, into the novel. After all, Bakhtin (1981: 269–422) has pointed out that the novel is open to all ideas and input. He links this openness to the power of heteroglossia, or the mixing of various languages and genres, to the vitality of the novel. This mixing is one of the sociolinguistic sources of the

literary grotesque. Steiner also argues for a new novel, the Pythagorean Genre (Steiner, 1998: 78–94).

By including his previously published essays in his new novel, Wilding is working in an experimental way that resembles the methods he uses in his documentary novels by combining the actual words of the historical person into a new dialogue that allows the actors to have their own voices as both historical figura and as literary characters . . . another form of Wilding's grotesquerie.

As a teacher of literary skills, Wilding illustrates these thinking or interpretive responses in the dialogues that feature prominently in his fictions. Nothing is left to reported or recorded recounts. Such recordings are prone to be hacked or accessed by the surveillance spooks. This is Fullalove's tactic:

> "The answer is not to write at all," he said. "Remember the Chinese proverb . . . 'What the mouth emits is wind, the pen leaves traces' which he then contradicts or retracts when he quotes the Irish proverb, 'Whatever you say, say nothing'." (Wilding, 2017: 100–101)

The Socratic (or even Pre-Socratic) orality, the questioning that characterizes most of the dialogical exchanges in Wilding's fictions is as much a way of teasing out possible ambiguities, as it is a way of eliciting responses from readers who are trying to guess the solution to the problematic, to use a recycled Lukácsian term from the 1930s, posed by the fiction. It is also a source of humour. And a way of disguising lessons to blind the prying eyes of the authorities, whoever they may now be.

Having set up the loom, I want to thread or unthread the novel as a way back into the greater labyrinth of Wilding's works, much as Penelope does when she stalls the suitors in *The Odyssey* by promising to choose one of them once she has finished sewing Laertes' shroud, only to unthread it each night, until Odysseus can return and save her from having to make such a choice. To do this will mean following the trail of the novel's labyrinthine plot of doubles, liminal spaces, ambiguities, puns, paradoxes, oxymorons, linguistic code-mixing, exposures of hypocrisy, duplicity, double crosses, dialectics, paranoia, and conspiracies. While this may seem a naïve linear way of reading, it is not . . . as we will be deploying several of the perceptions developed already in our reading of the end of the book, along with traces of vision of yet another critical frame (see Ginzburg: 2012). Also, by moving from the end to the beginning and from the beginning to the end, we trace the double weaving pattern

that Penelope duplicitously uses as part of her own grotesque strategies to forestall perhaps her fate or those who threaten her.

The meaning of this mythic method will hopefully shape itself as we go along or descend on our quest through *In the Valley of the Weed* and shadow the labours of Plant in his digging or stumbling through the dark valley of the weed of the north coast of New South Wales and perhaps the valley of death in the chthonic, hellish, city of Sydney. Armed with hindsight, we can walk in Wilding's library . . . as he walked in Dr Dee's library in his documentary study (1999) . . . the one he renovates, perhaps as a sanctuary for the reader through the rich allusions and links to other art works, against the crumbling or fragmenting edifices of the libraries of the real worlds he warns are looming (see Wilding, 2011 and 2014), I wander through this library coming across ideas, themes, threads serendipitously, in a *Sortes Vergilianae* or *Sortes Sacre*, remembering as I browse that Horace Walpole, the progenitor or precursor of gothic grotesques (his Castle of Otranto and his Strawberry Hills home) coined the word "serendipity". In following this thread, I am re-enacting Plant's own method of research where he stumbles through his investigations, asking questions, experiencing the weird and wild lives he leads, only to discover that it is the journey that teaches us the meaning, not the telos or ending. Endings are only invitations to rewind the Ariadne threads or recycle the novel to start at the beginning. Or, they are dangerous places for the paranoid, as witnessed in Plant's fate at the end of *In the Valley of the Weed*.

The secret question that looms as we proceed in our reading of the novel may be: If Wilding is right when he warns against the dangers of an intrusive surveillance network, should we the readers and critics actually publicly expose this warning and teach in our critical responses the techniques or ways of avoiding such intrusions or transgressions? Yet, if we remain silent, then how will others learn about the dangers and ways of coping with them? We too are in the double bind. Are solutions to these issues keys to a way of renovating the study of literature (within the academy in classes, or outside it in the public spaces of the writers, readers, and reviewers of novels) to make it relevant again and attractive to real people interested in the real world of art? If the answer to these questions is "yes", then we may need to learn how to communicate in secret, or not, in ways to simultaneously reveal and conceal the secrets of our reading groups or cells (actual class rooms or tutorials / reading groups where we can discuss our ideas and communicate again). Such a way of communicating or sharing our experience would require some education in a new allegorical way of seeing, and a deep sense of the value of ambiguity (and plausible

deniability). It would also demand that we ask questions about the ethics of what we are doing.

Our ability to write about our thoughts in plain sight of those who would spy on us may be facilitated, if Wilding and his detectives are right, by the illiteracy of those in power, or at least, in their lack of interest in reading anything of literary value. To such literalistic misguidedly utilitarian or opportunistic researchers after government grant blood money, such texts that Wilding creates would appear as impenetrable, much as the texts of Renaissance magi were intended to be to ward off prying eyes. Or, they would seem to be "just" detective stories . . . not much serious thinking to see, so move on!

The downside to this possibility is that such a blind reader is being produced in academe, not only in the misnamed social sciences, but in the now decimated humanities. And this destruction is supported by the deconstruction of libraries as reading spaces. To many potential readers, such messages would seem to be (William) Jamesian "blooming, buzzing confusion", as in the eyes of a newborn baby. Another cover for any secrets is that such dangerous books are hidden in the labyrinthine Fisher stacks at Sydney University. But, even this once sacred-like space is under threat as books are being stored (hidden, imprisoned) in depositories away from any serendipitously guided inquiring eyes of students who may have otherwise stumbled on them in a random search through the libraries. Even worse, as we are told in the novel, the books may be dumped or destroyed as landfill. The book is as much in danger as the writer in Wilding's world. And if the book and the writer are threatened, then what of the reader? Wilding prefigures these ideas in his journalism in, for example, his "Libraries under Threat", (2014) and "The Great Purge of Our Libraries" (2011). These articles in turn seem to be spun from a plot in his *Academia Nuts* (2002), where the Vice-Chancellor downloads a book written by Henry Lancaster, the hero of the novel, and publishes it as his own work thinking that it was a study of bureaucracy, not a novel satirizing the university. Here Wilding's spinning together of factual, fictional, historical threads into a multi-formed grotesquerie is at the centre of his labyrinthine fictional morphing spaces.

While some of Wilding's works have been banned in the past for risqué (or what was perceived as overtly obscene—excuse the oxymoron) language, the "dirty" words being censored in *In the Valley of the Weed* by the satanic Angela Dark and "literary" Agent Orange under the aegis of politically correct postures from universities that have turned their backs on concepts of academic freedom are the new dangerous words related to free speech, freedom of thought, academic freedom. If this reading is plausible, then is Wilding running the risk of incurring the wrath of the thought police by raising the issue of language at all?

Such new writing may be so dangerous that it invites a fearful turning of a blind eye to it by readers who want to protect their anodyne lifestyles. This is a new version of what George Steiner warns against when he laments the decline of "humane literacy", and of the teaching of literature in particular as part of what he sees as "the retreat from the word" (Steiner, 1998: 3–35).

To access the books that are hidden from view takes some willingness to go with the flow and be open to the randomness of observation. Each experience Plant, and so the reader, undergoes resembles finding a new book in a library stacks. Experience is casual and unexpected . . . immediate. These fragments or bits of knowledge, allusions, quotations, references, are then assembled later. In learning the lesson of how to create and put together such fragments into meaningful works or art or scholarship, the reader may learn experientially and experimentally . . . not abstractly or by rules or joining the numbers printed out for us in a colouring-in book. Reading is the ultimate literary experience, in John Dewey's sense of how we learn from experience. In an aside, or *anekdota*, I am reminded of Wilding talking to me about William Morris' idea in *News from Nowhere* that the British Library was dismantled and its blocks used to build new houses for the post-revolutionary idyllic youth. This idea he incorporated in his chapter on Morris in his critical study *Political Fictions*.

All learning is a creative act. By fusing academic and creative writing in his work, Wilding offers to the students thirsty for alternatives to the etiolated learning all too often found in academe a new vision or way, one that at least modifies the monstrous offerings of Theory as a substitute for criticism, where actual works of art are ignored in the name of theories and abstractions disguised as boring fictions that won't recognize that that is all they are. I end on a grotesque note, in a parody or dark shadow of the tortuous syntax that seems to characterize the writings of too many in power at present in the academic realm. Hopefully, the Milesian tone that often rises in the personal voices in this essay blends with the Menippean tone of Low gossipish diglossic speech as a step to an ecology of academic writing and living.

Note and references

1. As an essay-in-brief (a concept adapted from Wilding's essay on Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, in *Political Fictions* (1980), I would note that while Wilding's first solo academic book was on Henry James, James himself is a precursor to Marcel Proust, whose remembered pasts

are presented in *In Search of Lost Time* as objective realities in that the lack of conscious memory means that no deliberate or ideological refashioning of the facts or the remembering of them occurs. So the emergent image is not distorted by habit (another word for "ideology"). The immediacy (a word that echoes later in Wilding's method or theory of "The Fiction of Instant Experience") in *Growing Wild*, pp. 211–223, and in Don Graham's (2013) book length study of Wilding's fictions is an indicator of objectivity . . . it is stored unconsciously at first, free from being altered in the image of other parts of our unconscious until later we remember it and shape it into art or knowledge when we observe it, as an instance of Labov's Observer's Paradox where we transform what we see by seeing it when that thing knows it is being observed. This change may occur when we put that memory into words or into our art. The technology or methods we use to observe anyone or anything also changes what we see. The self-conscious writer morphs in this process, as would a reader who suspected that he or she was being watched by the writer or by the state through various surveillance technologies. Needless to say, the postmodern stance of reflexivity also impacts and distorts the novelist's ability to represent whatever is being represented. While there may be two consciousnesses at work, we have to decide if one or both are false conscious in Georg Lukács' (1971) sense . . . the chapter titled "Class Consciousness" first published in 1920 and included in the first German edition of the book in 1922. Habits, clichés, pre-set forms condition us to see what we expect or wish to see in our mystification or reified consciousness. Proust circumvents these traps by finding ways of remembering in minds he had in the past, not in his present mind. Each of these previous minds may be understood as a Pasiphaë's Cow in which we insert our present or new mind to create new Minotaur works of grotesque proportions. The old minds communicate with the present mind of the writer in his own narratorial Cow so that there is a doubling or grotesque folding of time over space. These doublings that James and Proust were fond of provide the energy that generates or creates new labyrinths or palimpsests. Raising the past, like raising spirits, is a dangerous act that seems Faustian in two directions: not only to live forever going forwards, but to do so by going backwards . . . and to do so simultaneously once one has discovered the alchemy of grotesque mixtures. This frame of reference is, I believe, a secret or hermetic force in Wilding's art, whether it be academic, creative, or publishing as arts.

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Vicki Viidikas

New and Rediscovered / Vicki Viidikas, edited by Barry Scott

Melbourne: Transit Lounge, 2010.

Writing this review of a posthumously published book of poems in verse and prose by a woman I knew very briefly in the late 1980s has been a cathartic experience. I first met Vicki Viidikas when I had just finished my doctoral dissertation and was managing the Sandringham Hotel in Newtown. One of my jobs there was to book bands. I approached Michael Wilding, who had supervised my PhD and asked for his help in finding poets so that I could have a regular Saturday afternoon residency-type of gig. I had several song writers who wanted to read or recite their lyrics: Dave Studdert, Louis Tillett among them. Michael suggested that I meet Vicki and two other poets, Robert Adamson and Stephen Oliver. After reading some of her work, Vicki asked me if she could have a room in the hotel, as she was short of money and had nowhere to live. At that time, the upper story of the hotel was a kind of half way house for other artists anyway, so I gave her a room.

I didn't ask her about any substances she was or was not taking . . . many of the inner city bands' habits made such questions pointless. She sometimes came downstairs, bringing her own drinks, to listen to bands like Paris Green or Roaring Jack who were also in residency at that time. I turned a blind eye to her smuggling of drinks too.

Eventually the hotel's owner came to one of the Saturday afternoon gigs to see what I was doing . . . some of the locals (posties, brickies, wharfies) were gossiping to the owner about the "weirdos and freaks" who were taking over the pub and making their quiet Saturday afternoon drinking sessions unbearable. The owner took an instant dislike to Vicki and Vicki reciprocated. I started thinking that the owner may have been jealous as Vicki was the only female performer and she seemed to challenge the owner's position. Vicki wasted no time telling the owner what she thought of her. This went on for a month or so until finally Vicki moved out of the hotel and stopped coming to the afternoon gigs.

What I remember about her readings was that she was very withdrawn at first, but as she continued to recite her work, her voice became stronger, although there was still a brittle nervousness to her performances. The audience was not exactly receptive to her; but they weren't that receptive to anyone for that matter. This made for an atmosphere at once crazy, frenetic and chaotic. But Vicki didn't seem to take much notice of that; she didn't let it bother her: she was going to read and speak her mind, no matter what . . . unpretentiously yet adamantly. Part of the problem with the audience was that it wasn't what could be called

bourgeois. Newtown in the mid to late 1980s was still a working class area and the hotel was very distinctly working class. When Vicki had a confrontation with some local, I'd ask myself why she was putting herself through this. Was it self destruction or self denial? She was a fish out of water in that scene.

These were some of my impressions at that time that have remained unresolved. Since I started reading some of her work from the recently published *Vicki Viidikas: New and Rediscovered*, some responses to such questions have been flooding my mind, making the writing of this review as much a review of my past and the short time I spent in Vicki's presence as it is a review of her work independent of that time. But I can't stop myself filtering her poems through my memories of her, the poet who made being in the wrong place at the wrong time into a virtue. I see now through a glass darkly perhaps, but that glass is what makes Vicki's images so brutally stark and raw. The edges of her image are sharpened, not rounded by the passage of time and the tricks memory plays on me.

From "Future", a prose poem, I read:

> It really doesn't matter if I met him in a bar, picked him up or was picked up, in the morning he pushed me out of bed saying, "You must go, my wife's due back." And catching the 7.43 a.m. bus I thought, it doesn't really matter, what did I expect?

Behind the brutal honesty is a sense of her vulnerability at the hands of the adulterous lying man who has pushed her out in the early hours of the morning. The recording of the exact time of the bus tells us that she was hurt; I can see her sitting alone on a deserted bus trying to hide her hurt feelings behind the self-accusing disclaimer of "what did I expect?" She then remembers that as a girl she was told by a fortune teller "You will travel!" The mundane irony of the bus trip fulfilling this fortune makes me think that she would have a bitter laugh at her own life when things turned sour.

Again, in "Loaded Hearts", Vicki is writing from within the destructive element of a kind of community house where:

> Our fingers are snarling in chaos
> Oh take it easy baby the lords have too many kingdoms
> They're playing darts with hypodermics
> The fools are recording pain
> We're making weapons from our dreams

These stunning images stick together; they are slammed into each other through the poet's own mind-forged manacles, to use an image from William Blake. This vision comes out of the place, possibly somewhere in India, peopled by the lost or at least dispersed souls whom she has met in one of her several sojourns there. But there is no sense of recollections coming as memories: she is in the scene she describes, observing without judging. She sees all the others finally coming together in "our dreams". She has this ability to respond with immediacy to the nightmarish world while "Tigers are eating through walls and Hendrix is playing from hell" and where "The fridge is full of dope and he's trying to live a quiet life". The words she shapes are "loaded hearts", like intoxicated guns. The image, again, is loaded with so many possibilities, all of which seem to pull the sense apart; but not quite. The poet who can remain cogent in this turmoil doesn't write words that fall apart. Her will to say what she feels remains strong. And yet, there are the ejaculations that start several lines: "Oh boy", "O sigh" and Oh gee". Here I sense the vulnerability of a young and innocent language that seems out of place in this whirl of crazy experience. The two voices are crashed together to make us sense that the one thing we aren't told in the poem is what the writer is doing; but of course, she is the one recording these images and registering her love of them in the same words she registers her emotional distance in the adolescent ejaculations.

Her powers of sensuous observation come through in "O woman of the moon" where, following the title she slips into the wet body of the poem with the continuation of her utterance:

> she is full with yearning
> for the double-eye, night of fire, the bursting of the blossom

The images seem to swim on the page in this Sappho-like hymn to the woman Vicki sees her reflection in as the moon silently shapes her world in a series of blended images. Such control appeals to the poet; it is the message she receives on the shore, before dawn, from "the harlot messenger" who has illuminated her "night of fire":

> so powerful her gaze to rearrange tides twist the dolphins through the haze
> of their slippery grey directions

There seems to be a desire to shape the life around her which comes out in the physical sensuality and suggestiveness of the images. Vicki is the moon poet and this poem is her

shaping of her world away from the craziness of her material world of the men and women who we see in other poems make her life so vulnerable:

her face without a dream
her face which is the dream

This poem is the moon's dream as seen by the poet while looking into her (own) face. She is the woman of the moon. Vicki's dream seems to be her own "Bright Star", only she is willing to show us the things that she tries to control. The moon's message is the dream which is this dream poem.

For some unfathomable reason, I remember a line from a song on *Ego Tripping at the Gates of Hell* (Citadel Records, 1989), an album Louis Tillett released around the time I knew Vicki: "I'm swimming in the mirror", sung by a female voice in counterpoint to Louis's line "to swim alone with you". For Vicki, swimming alone in her poem gives her the power to create an image of the life she longs for. Like Louis, Vicki seems to be singing to herself, to reassure herself that her "giving off her message, satin smooth" brings her the closure she needs without needing a full stop to end the poem.

This poem seems to float on the page, just as the moon's images float on the water in Vicki's eyes. To interpret this poem beyond this point is to miss the point: it is to be experienced, not analysed into a single thesis statement. All I can do is register my emotional impressions as I read it. And, perhaps, that would be all Vicki would want. It would make her happy.

In "Fig" I can now hear Vicki's frenetic and nervous voice as she burrowed over the microphone on the milk crate stage of the hotel.

It hits me from the opening:

It was all the time you were going
leaving bare seeds along the ground

You were fig
so much texture something rich to put the mind around

Burst fig not wanting
to be open at the core

I hear the mixture of blame, frustration and fulfillment in this breakup poem with yet another person whose promise of fertility proved sterile. She realizes that he was all the time "spilling seeds that will not grow". The gaps in the middle of the lines suggest the hollowness or emptiness she feels and yet she seems to open him up in these lines despite his not wanting to be opened. She bursts the fig with her tongue as she enunciates the words. For someone like Vicki, who seems to open herself to the core in every line she writes, such a relationship would be as doomed as the one she experienced in "Future" where love has slipped yet again through "my fingers spread out to touch".

While the men and women she writes to and of may have not been able to respond, we the readers of these poems can respond. By opening ourselves to the raw emotions, the wild images, the sincerity of her voice, we can, at least, offer to her a sense of fulfillment or completion. She seems to predict this when she writes in "The Letter", where she asks herself and the reader:

> How
> to describe these things?

She cannot, so she writes, as in a letter to her readers as much as to her lover:

> The flesh of the word,
> the tongue of his love
> I won't try to speak of these,
> you'll feel then and understand
> they transport
> and are in this world.

This is her request to us: feel the words and the emotions she breaks out of them, then you will understand her and she will transport you back into this world, the one we share in all its raw physicality and honesty.

Vicki Viidikis is unique. This may explain why she never seemed to fit into any one "scene" for very long and why she experienced so much disappointment. But it also may be the source of her strength as she remained true to herself while she kept moving on to look for life.

Did she ever find it? I don't know. She, like so many others from the time I knew her, is gone. And then I read her poems and she still brings life back to me. That is her gift, I

guess. I now have a sense of loss. I too am frustrated; not for myself, but for all the artists I have known who remain undervalued or even forgotten in their own country.

In bringing so much of Vicki's writing together, Barry Scott has done an invaluable thing for Vicki and for the rest of us. My one regret is that I never recorded her voice on those Saturday afternoons when she read her poems to the punters in Newtown. It is still there in her poems; only, for new readers, without the extra texture of having known her in the flesh, which is how she seemed to insist on knowing life. The experience of reading these poems makes Vicki for me not only new and rediscovered, but remembered.

Leaving Home with Henry, Phillip Edmonds

Melbourne: Arcadia, Press On, 2010.

More often than not, literary criticism seems busy telling the past what it was really like. Novels, at least historical ones, do the same thing. But, refreshingly, Phillip Edmonds's novella *Leaving Home with Henry* turns this process upside down by having Henry Lawson, one of Australia's great writers, come to life on a road trip with Trevor, a contemporary writer who has "a wider mission into where mateship might be" (10). As the two writers drive across the continent, they talk about what they see of the new Bushlife and the types of characters they meet on the way.

Like Trevor, who sees his trip as "only skirting the country for to be totally prepared would only be to conquer, summarise, understand it, when why shouldn't it remain a mystery?" (10), Edmonds's novella offers a series of glimpses into events that echo the impressionistic sketches Lawson offers in his own stories without omniscient judgments and evaluations. To have written a long novel about Lawson would be incommensurate with the ways Lawson thought and wrote. The eighty pages of the text of *Leaving Home with Henry* are comprised of sixteen episodic chapters with only one chapter exceeding four pages in length.

What this means for readers not familiar with Lawson is that they are given a feel for what a Lawson story or sketch is like. This seems fitting, given the ways Trevor thinks of Lawson as one of his inspirations from his school days: "Our stories for once and not another off-colour English imitation" (12). The two stories Trevor remembers reading at school seem to offer the reader familiar with Lawson's work a key to what Edmonds is doing. "The Drover's Wife" and "The Union Buries Its Dead" offer two sides of Lawson; the one a vision of the bleak loneliness of an isolated woman, the other a near-farcical dark comedy of a stranger's funeral in Bourke where the community who attend the procession fall away as they get more drunk. Trevor sees Henry Lawson's life in terms of the wide variations in his view of the world: "swinging on a fulcrum of promise and desperation" (12).

The question silently suggested by the way Edmonds sets up the scene is whether Trevor is a modern day Henry Lawson. If we see their relationship this way, we may explain the small amount of recorded direct speech the two characters share on their trip; they see things in very much the same way, so there is no real need for them to explain themselves to each other. After Trevor has visited the National Library in Canberra to read Lawson's letters, he drives out of Yass and finds Henry sitting in his car reciting bits of poems. There is

no discussion of whether Trevor is mad or just fantasizing about his companion; perhaps this is a version of magic realism? That is left up to the reader to decide if he or she wants to go down that track.

As they drive around the country, we start to notice that no one recognizes the national icon; he's just another bloke to them. The characters or larrikins they meet are not all that different to the ones Lawson had met in the 1890s on his travels through the same parts of the country. But there is a difference in the ways things were written about then compared to the ways we want our fiction now. Trevor complains to Henry:

> Nowadays people want to be distracted and you write about the country like a larrikin forensic scientist, telling jokes about people they can't feel superior to. I know you didn't like the bush, but you wrote about it. People now want to live in cities with at least two cars, four bedrooms, a spa, and not be weak enough to ask for help from a trade union, that kind of thing. Today stories are about the problems of love and the pace of change, and very little else, I suspect. (24-25)

There seems to be a lot on Trevor's liver that he needs to get off. He calls Henry "feral" and seems to blame him when he explains, "If it wasn't for a few people like me, you'd have been forgotten years ago" (28). This isn't exactly the small talk we have been led to expect by the title of the chapter or sketch this diatribe appears in. Is Trevor's outburst a result of his own delusional fantasy; a product of his coming to terms with his own literary function; or is it an expression of what Lawson himself seems to represent: the larrikin disregard for authority and convention mixed with an egalitarian spirit of mateship where people can say what's really on their minds? Or is this just an example of the Tall Poppy Syndrome whereby Australians seem to delight in pulling anyone down who has achieved any success? Henry's response maintains his equanimity and defuses the situation:

> Henry was taken aback, but he saw the humour in Trevor's broad brush and admired the man for getting rid of the bullshit . . . He saw why Trevor was audacious about the big picture, because the little pictures disappointed him. (29)

Another response from Henry could have been to quote himself from "Two Larrikins" in *On the Track* (1900) when Stowsher asks, "But wot's all this got to do with it?" Henry is magnanimous in his keeping of his response to himself; he doesn't have to prove anything to Trevor, and he knows it. Or perhaps Trevor's fantasy, if that is what it is, doesn't work that

way; he knows how Henry would have responded anyway. Trevor seems to need to get these ideas out of his system as he learns to see things in a different way on his road trip which will eventually lead to his letting go of Henry.

By this point in the novella, we are wondering whether Henry will ever be able to find stories to tell in the Bush as it now is. But by the time they make it into Nimbin on the north coast of New South Wales, things start to change. Henry has a sexual encounter with a modern woman and disappears for a while. When Trevor reports him missing, the police officer quips:

> Mate, I've seen pretty well everything in this job, but never before have I been asked to go looking for a national icon, except when we have to shoot them if their numbers get out of control.

We can recognize in this comment the sardonic or at least laconic spirit of the people we find in Lawson's stories. But this is now Trevor's story; he is experiencing his own version of Australia as it comes into contact with its past and he is learning from it. It is also Edmonds revelling in his own element.

In Surfer's Paradise, Trevor meets Kirsty, "a healthy brunette from the U.S." (73) who asks him what the Australian Dream is. His response is interesting as it marks a break from his attempts to think like Henry:

> He felt like one of those Thai dogs he'd seen in Bangkok, who people say are Buddhists, inscrutable animals who watch the world go by in all its absurdity and joy. (73)

This comes out of the blue until we remember that Trevor's original impetus for his road trip was that he had "just returned from India and wanted to go to a place where there weren't as many people" (9). He has had his own experiences on roads outside Australia. Trevor is starting to use this experience to think with as he finds his own voice.

Later, Trevor and Henry go to a nightclub on Chevron Island in Queensland where they encounter a Pauline Hansonesque woman. She is being courted by "greying middle-aged men" although she seems the type of person Trevor's friends would call a "slapper", Edmonds the writer intervenes to give her a name that he makes up: "We'll call her Cheryl, for the sake of the story" (77). Cheryl's lunatic fringe ideas about Asians, AIDS, Africans,

terrorists and all the other phobias that infest a certain segment of the population's psyches, wins her a crowd of admirers in this den of mediocrity:

> She had been admired, people said, because she didn't care what people thought of her. She was a racist larrikin given licence in a country that couldn't even cope with the likes of Henry. Others said that powerful politicians let her go because they were frightened of the big Australian Dream which might be unearthed if the real story of mateship is ever told. (78)

Just before Henry gets on a bus to travel to Sydney alone, he tells Trevor of his impressions of the people he has seen on Stradbroke Island, but may just as well be describing all those he has encountered so far:

> They are people more often than not frightened of themselves, and because of that, of ideas, but they can be kind and full of joy. (86)

When in Sydney, Henry goes to a Writers' Conference and hears an expert pontificating on the works of Henry Lawson "without the sense to acknowledge how people construct stories for their own reasons during different times" (88). Henry feels that he must correct this academic view and so responds:

> I've learnt from a recent trip around the country that we must try to look outward and inward at the same time. The story isn't about you or me. It's bigger than that kind of little canvas. (88)

Henry has the last word in the novella, though we feel that he is ventriloquizing Edmonds's view, when he reflects to himself that "the story of this land, if given half a chance, can still be strong enough to sweep away the puffed up and the powerful" (89).

What Edmonds's novella gives us are instances of how the voices of those we meet need to be heard and engaged with; not to fit them into our own small world, but to recognize that we are just partners in their telling of their stories. This is mateship and the egalitarian spirit that Lawson recognized and still epitomizes to those who are willing to listen to him with open ears.

For those who are unfamiliar with the Australian story, as much as for literary people or those Australians who don't know of Lawson except his image on a postage stamp, Edmonds' novella offers an invaluable insight into how we talk with and about each other.

This is Lawson's great achievement that seems to inspire Edmonds. Edmonds also offers a way of keeping alive the great writers' voices by engaging with them in open and frank discussions about what we mean as people. We have much to learn from Lawson and Edmonds, not only about Australia and its literature, but about ourselves in relation to others we meet on our literary or geographical travels. The wit and humour evinced by Edmonds in his work encourages us not to take ourselves too seriously and to give voice to the larrikin that may still live in us if only we know where to look for him or her.

New Australian Fictions in the Asian Century:

Steve Jacobs and Kirsten Krauth, *Three Women . . . One Man*

Steve Jacobs, *Wild Strawberries*; Kirsten Krauth, *Just_a_girl*, UWA Press.

Writing a review of two novels simultaneously may seem bizarre, but there are connections between these two writers . . . at least in this reviewer's mind and experience. The back story to this attempt goes back to when I was at Mosman High School with Steve Jacobs and we would cross Military Road from the school to stand in the newsagent's shop reading books that were still banned or prohibited in Australia. This is while the Liberal government was still in power before Gough Whitlam defeated them at the next election and started bringing Australia into the twentieth century . . . at least in terms of the arts. The novels we stood there reading but not being allowed to buy (as we were too young) were Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* among others. Later, while I was doing my postgraduate studies, I worked as a stage hand on Steve Jacob's first theatre production (Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*) and then with him and Barbara Pepworth (a rising young novelist at the time) on a screenplay for the Experimental Film Fund of N.S.W. which was ominously titled "All Good Things". None of these projects were what would commonly be called a success, but we developed a sort of camaraderie between us, feeling that we were isolated from the Philistine life that seemed to infest Australian surburbia at the time, especially as that Philistinism seemed to manifest itself on the lower north shore of Sydney.

My relationship with Kirsten Krauth, fittingly was developed on Facebook when I found her on a page of Sydney University graduates; she has a Masters in the Creative Writing program that Michael Wilding had set up before he took early retirement from the university. I asked Kirsten for a copy of *Just_a_girl* when she announced its imminent publication on Facebook, and promised to write a review of it. In some ways, as I first read it, I was taken back to Barbara Pepworth's first novel (*Early Marks*) which she had just published when Steve Jacobs and I were working with her on "All Good Things". Since making friends with her, she has taken up a position at the N.S.W. Writers' Centre where she edits and writes for their *Newswrite* magazine. Again, there are connections as the Writers' Centre was for a while run by Irina Dunn and Michael Wilding who are on the board of the *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society*. Irina did an interview with me in 2004 for the same magazine that Kirsten now edits. It does seem to be a small world; or at least, the connections and relationships between people seem to be getting stronger. And that can only be a good thing. All of this relates to the essay I wrote for the previous issue of the *Asian*

Journal of Literature, Culture and Society where I talked about Wilding's collaborative spirit and suggested that Australian literature needs more real collaboration between its players. I mention these connections and relationships because in their respective novels the relationships are quite different. For both writers, the focus of their narratives is on the dysfunctionality of relationships. For this reviewer, relationships between readers and writers is an important matter, as discussed in an article in an earlier number of the *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society*.

The perhaps strange way I met Kirsten Krauth mirrors the experiences of her characters in her first novel and I try to write about a city, Sydney, that is the shaping location of her narratives even though I have not lived in that city for twenty-three years but still call it my home city on Facebook . . . the place I am ostensibly "from". Looking at Krauth's work first, the main character, Layla, is narrated through what sounds like her blog. We are not meant to know who she is writing to, even though her voice has an immediacy as though she were speaking to us. If her narrative is a diary blog, then she is meant to be writing to herself . . . only in a public forum. She makes no attempt to hide any of her thoughts or actions. Her mother Margot's narrative seems totally disconnected to Layla's thoughts . . . fittingly so, given the dysfunctional relationship they have which explains in part the wild life Layla now lives as a fourteen-year-old girl having casual encounters with men she meets on the internet. The third narrative centre of the novel, if the novel has a centre at all, is the story of Tadashi told by an omniscient narrator. This may be very difficult for an Asian reader to follow; but the structure is necessary in order for Krauth to bring out the ways society in Australia may be falling apart in the postmodern age.

While it is tempting to see Krauth's novel as a version of Nabokov's *Lolita*, such a reading would need to deal with the absence of the Humbolt figure that dominates Nabokov's novel. I see the novel as closer to Erika Jong's *Fear of Flying* . . . as a feminist answer to the male writers who focus on women as sex objects, just as Jong's novel seems to be such an answer to Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. To make the references more complex, the novel's title references a song by No Doubt ("Just a Girl") in which Gwen Stefani sings of her awareness of how she is looked at by men in American postmodern society as "just your typical prototype" . . . which she may be for the Layla character in Krauth's novel.

But the main thing these two writers seem to share is a visceral language that is not shy of confronting topics that may have been off the agenda in recent years: explicit sexuality and the bizarre contexts that sexuality finds expression in. In Krauth's *Just_a_girl*, we follow three Faulkneresque narratives as a young girl Layla, her Christian fundamentalist mother

Margot, and Tadashi, a Japanese man with a love doll move around Sydney. Not much talking in the "real world" occurs; Tadashi seems to address Mika, his doll, in his head but doesn't actually talk to others; Margot seems to report the impact of conversations she has, especially with God; Layla is too busy organizing assignations with men she meets on line to talk to them, but she seems to have the habit of talking to the reader in Netspeak. While she does record snippets of exchanges she has with some of the men she sleeps with, the exchanges (they can hardly be called conversations) are usually banal minimal pairs. The lack of dialogue seems to be Krauth's silent point: in this new age of socializing through technology, a young girl doesn't develop a taste for dialogue face-to-face and she has long since ceased trying to talk to her mother, while Tadashi seems to want a relationship where the female simulacrum does no talking.

For the most part, speech is reported in the three narratives that form the novel, thus suggesting one aspect of the alienation process at work in Sydney. While the two females' narratives are in the first person, the male's story is objectively narrated by an uninvolved omniscient narrator. All three characters' speech is marked by the various technologies—the internet, drugs and love dolls—that they rely on to live their lives. Layla's speech often sounds that of someone with ADHD; Margot's is self-obsessed or delusional and Tadashi's is non-existent. While this may suggest a bleak vision of social reality, Krauth manages to make the stories into narratives of black humour until at the end the true tragedy of Layla's "escapades" may (or may not) lead to her death in a Thelma and Louise like moment. But even then, the stories come across as a comedy of terrors. The language in all three of the interwoven narratives is appropriate to the characters; even the passionless cold language of the Tadashi episodes reflects the reality of his relationship with Mika, his doll that he carries all over the Sydney landscape. Krauth lets the reader link the meaning of this alienated Asian man's story to the ways men treat Layla and Margot in their stories; she does not spell the links out: we may start to see that there isn't much difference in the ways men treat women in the lives of Layla, Margot and Mika the inflatable doll.

While Jacobs' narrative is set in 1980s Thatcher's London, and so seems far removed from the narrative focus in Krauth's novel, there are similarities. There is a concern for the alienating impact of the social world on the characters who are reduced through the banality of their lives to seeking sexual gratification as a replacement for meaningful relationships. But the alienating forces back in the 1980s were easier to delineate as the postmodern world was just then being shaped by the reactionary forces Thatcher and her ilk were consciously unleashing in explicitly ideological forms. In Jacobs' *Three Women . . . One Man* we have

the story of a troupe of actors caught in rehearsing a bad play blandly titled *The Bus Driver*. The play revolves around a bus driver who sexually assaults his passengers as he drives around the city while the novel centres on the sexual relationships between the actors as they try to bring the doomed play to life. Somehow, there is a connection between the actors that is shaped by the theatrical production they are involved in. While the play isn't meant to be a farce, the impact of rehearsing and performing it on the characters in the novel seems to be turning their lives into a farce which in turn feeds back on their attitudes to the play they are "in", making it into a farce eventually too.

Life imitating art and vice versa are the epistemological issues of this novel, which in Krauth's novel is also a force . . . but through different technologies and media. In Jacobs' first novel, we have the implied reference to the standard dramatic trope of the Elizabethan theatre: life is a stage and we are but actors on it. We are all actors in Thatcher's world. Consequently, we are all performing . . . sexually, socially and theatrically. Because the idiot director of the play wants the actors to use Method techniques, they are forced to try to get inside the one-dimensional characters they are trying to represent. In such a bad play, they can do no more than present these characters and resist the techniques forced on them by the director whose one great idea is to have the bus driver (the ostensible main character) played by a manikin dummy. (Here the link to Tadashi's "girlfriend" suggests itself.) To be a method actor in such a situation requires one to be dehumanized. In the play, the novel's central male character, the One Man of the title, plays a German psychiatrist in love with his Nazi patient, or so it seems. The clichéd scenario is part of the humour of the novel as Ambrose Palmer, the novel's hero, tries to keep his sanity by subverting the rehearsals of the play to bring out the absurdity of the play and the actors' situation. To keep his sanity, Ambrose has to take Method Acting a step further and become a bad actor in a bad play in order to keep his sanity in his relationships with the three women and the play he is meant to be in. One has to be as bad as the characters one is trying to represent on stage if one is to succeed. Ambrose sees their relationship in terms of "a group of misfits worshiping alienation" when they are taken to a lunatic asylum (a metaphor for Thatcher's England) and forced to interact with the damaged people there. Ambrose finds reality impinging on his consciousness there and flees following the directions of an inmate there who seems also to be playing a part in the presentation of the asylum. When one is in such a situation, one is in "the real world of make believe" and one had better start laughing at oneself if one is to survive. There may be references to Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* or Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* in this scenario of the novel. It seems more an attempt to renovate

Modernism than a celebration of Lyotard's postmodern condition. Ambrose's realization that "he had to get out of here quick" when he sees a sedated patient come to life reminds me of Poe's "Professor Tar and Doctor Feather" where the inmates of the asylum Poe's narrator visits to observe the cutting edge ways the patients are given a free run of the asylum end up turning their keepers into the inmates as the lunatics play the roles of the keepers for the visiting narrator.

Is the world Jacobs represents a play or a lunatic asylum . . . or has the distinction between these two metaphors been so blurred that they become fused as one? The absurdist humour of the omniscient narration that only really looks at Ambrose's point of view keeps the reader's sanity firmly anchored in the distance between the perception of reality as a fubar place and the representation of that place as a joke. We can laugh at the shenanigans of the characters and so judge them in ways that we feel uncomfortable doing in *Just_a_girl* where life has become far too serious for us to mock the absurdity of it all. In her world, the confusion between perception and reality is far too unsettling for us to laugh at the characters' foibles for we would be laughing at paedophilia, child exploitation, racism, insanity without any redeeming features. While Jacobs give us the narratological space in which to laugh, Krauth cuts this space away from us as we are always inside the heads of her characters or determinedly kept out of that space in the case of Tadashi. While Jacobs' novel may be a farewell to the theatre in its present form, as he works in adapting novels into his films (with his film *Disgrace* in 2010 winning such accolades as the Fipresci Prize at the Toronto film festival and the Grand Prize at the Taipei International Film Festival), the next novel of Kirsten Krauth awaits for us to read. Her first achievement will be a hard one to match.

The problem for both writers is that as reality is changing so quickly now, the task of the novelist in capturing those changes will be harder. The media involved are still developing at an apparently breakneck speed . . . perhaps faster than the novel as a form can adapt to them if the novel is to remain postmodern. But if the novel decides to return to the techniques and frames of a renovated modernism, then perhaps we can still find ways of representing that reality in a critical realist way that resists the impacts of a world it is trying to immerse itself in. Jacobs' novel may be a way out of the trap of the novelist who can adapt the ideas of Method Acting in the context of the novel instead of in film or on stage. Krauth seems to be heading in that direction too as she bravely writes from points of view that are seriously damaged in terms of the psychological traits of her characters. We live in interesting times as the battles over contested realities rage about us. The frontier of these

battles may be the interface Australian writers will have with Asian relationships as Australia self-consciously tries to move into a space that remains unexplored in Australian fiction and film. Will postmodern approaches work better in realizing these new worlds or will a renovated modernist realism (along the lines suggested by Gao Xingjian) be more successful in contesting reality?

Until I get a firmer grasp of the Australian realities I have been outside of for the past two decades, I don't have any way of knowing. But sitting in Asia looking at the new shapes of Australian fiction, I try to follow these developments in ways that perhaps those involved in the realities back in Australia may find strange or alien.

Stephen Oliver's *Intercolonial*

Puriri Press, 2013.

I first met the poet Stephen Oliver when he came with Vicki Viidikas and Robert Adamson to the Sandringham Hotel in what was then the working class south end of King Street, Newtown, to read their poems. While Robert Adamson seemed put off by the rowdy if not hostile audience at the venue, Stephen along with Vicki were intrepid enough to brave reading their poems. I have described this day in my review of Vicki's *New and Rediscovered*.

What I didn't talk about then was how Stephen was seemingly oblivious to the audience's negativity and charged into reading his work with a gusto and a fiery voice that soon intimidated the more vociferous "critics" in the audience into a more receptive mood, coming as it seemed to do from the Attic stage of Euripides in the fifth century BC. With his powerful radio-trained voice he demanded attention and received it, he was like a guard for the more vulnerable though no less intrepid Vicki with whom he had a close personal relationship that was clear from the ways they worked together in subsequent Saturday afternoon readings. Stephen would stand on the rickety stage, schooner of beer in one hand, as he chanted and boomed his poetry seemingly without the need of the microphone.

Since those days in the late 1980s I had lost contact with him until I started writing about Vicki's posthumous collected poems. As his image returned to me, I got back in contact with him through our mutual acquaintance, the seemingly ubiquitous Michael Wilding, who had first introduced Stephen to me and who, in those times, was silently becoming the new doyen of Australian letters after the legendary Jack Lindsay.

That voice of the poet returned to me as I started reading his epic poem *Intercolonial*. I could hear the barrage of images which he would use to confront his audience in the pub as much as his reader in his text as the poem jumps out from the page:

> Tusked cauliflowers and herded carrots, onions in piles, tumbled pumpkins, potato scree, boned and stalled in between scales that swung and creaked from the cream cabin roof of the Indian greengrocer's Bedford truck, his weekly round by the winding way of Helen and Apuka streets, right to the hill top ridge and Brooklyn-west, our feudal hearth in Karepa Street, perched high over the Wellington basin, that bounced off hill quakes about Te Whanga-Nui-a-Tara.

The love of physical details matched by the love of the physicality of language and the voice that brings that language to life give the quatrains a power and immediacy fitting for the new epic strain that the rest of this poem will reach for and attain in its grand control of space, time and the things that fill the chronotope. The land and the poet's imagination are on the move as the fault lines of the poem shake into life with the creation of a chaos out of which will emerge the final shapes of the poem. These fault lines mark the two geological plates over which Oliver's poetry moves and from which it gains its power as the poem shifts from the present to the past, from New Zealand to Australia and to Ireland and the northern seas as well as from the distant geological past to the colonial pasts of Australia and New Zealand and the more recent pasts and presents of the two southern lands.

Through this epic dreamscape moves the heroic Thomas McCormack, the poet's ancestor as much as his creation, as he shape shifts in Homeric ways in different parts of the poem as he moves more like Aeneas than Odysseus in the ways he is creating a new world through his adventures, not simply returning to the old world he left behind in an Ithaca of the past.

The seeming chaos, more like the Mesopotamian creation myth we know as the Enuma Elish, is more in the readers' minds as they are struck by the series of images that can only be formed cogently as the readers immerse themselves in the poetic experience of reading the poem: life is not a chronologically linear story but a grouping of experiences of things that only make sense when shaped by the poetic vision which Oliver has in abundance. By the end of the poem, we have a sense of the hereditary links that have been shaping the poem under its surfaces as tectonic plates or sections of the poem are fitted together or collide with each other out of which the narrative is pushed up to the surface . . . often violently, but always spectacularly and impressively.

Towards the end of the poem, which seems to promise the beginning in a circuitous vicus reminiscent of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* structure, we are given the death of the hero that leads to the birth of the poet-hero. The name and shape changing McCormack is now simply Cormac, not the son of anyone in particular as Oliver echoes in a parodic way the Lord's Prayer:

> Our father who fell down the porch steps after our father fell down red concrete steps our father lost his balance liquored up he was lost his balance and bumped his head our father did that heaps he did drunken fell and bumped his head now he is dead our father who made our life hell is not in heaven still maybe falling into the after-

> nothingness he believed in our father is still falling for ever and ever our father the bright young man who matriculated at fourteen star in the ascendant . . .

This nursery rhyme with Sermon on the Mount allusions segues into the recounting of Cormac's construction of his world back in the times of the Picts and the Romans. In a Blakean language, the epic ends with the parallel times and places being forged in the poet's mind: "Words sprung from the blade sang in his ears as he stepped."

To read this poem one has to let go of many of one's preconceptions of what modern poetry is and dream of what it may be. The bringing together of the colonies to form a new reality, one that is truly intercolonial, one must sail the stormy seas of the poet's visions and weather the physical and linguistic earthquakes that shape his world as he brings a new way of seeing the relationships between New Zealand and Australia out of the boring narrative of White Settlements that has sidetracked much critical and creative labour in the past. Only then can a true postcolonial experience emerge that asserts the independence of the still-colonial mind. We need to make our world anew.

By returning to the modernist voices from the Celtic world and the pre-British Maori landscapes and dreamscapes, Oliver has created a new voice in Trans-Tasman literature. It is one that may seem difficult to those of us who want to hear the usual postmodern word games and live in a world bereft of a past that informs the life of our words; but it hopefully is a voice and an achievement that will contribute in major ways to new developments in writing about our world by returning to the values of grand narratives—reconfigured though they will be—that have been held in disrepute in recent times.

Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia (17th–20th Centuries)

Edited by Claudine Salmon, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

This work was first published in 1987 and translated into Chinese in 1989. It has been out of print in both English and Chinese for many years, so its republication is a welcome development. Since its first publication, interest in the study of ways Chinese literature has been influential in Asia has grown exponentially along with the emergent economic power of China. For a student of the place of English in Asian cultures, this book offers a balance against the ways English power has been studied, especially in the English Language Teaching context. As Christine Salmon reflects in her Introduction to the volume:

> Few have attempted to cross these boundaries and reflect on the impact of Chinese fiction in neighbouring countries. Yet the Chinese language and Chinese script have been used for centuries in countries like Korea, Japan and Vietnam, and Chinese literature began to spread in these areas very early, beginning with the Confucian classics, Buddhist sutras and Chinese poetry.
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> In many countries, such as Korea and Vietnam, Chinese script was used for centuries before the development of indigenous scripts. This in part may explain the very strong historical influence of Chinese culture on these countries' intellectual traditions. In other countries such as Thailand which had their own scripts, translations of Chinese literature came later (in the early nineteenth century), and consequently had a different impact on the local cultures.

Salmon states that in this book the term traditional Chinese fiction refers to "novels and short stories of the Ming and Qing dynasties". *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has been the most often translated and imitated text in other Asian countries, with monarchs, scholars and courtiers using it to model their own governments. In countries such as Thailand, where the local Chinese community began to lose the ability to read in Chinese, translations started to appear. But at first, it was the Thai royal family who developed an interest in Chinese literature. Salmon notes that this was due to the popularity of Chinese acting troupes at court. In the early twentieth century, newspapers began to sponsor translations to publish for local Chinese as well as for others who had developed a taste for Chinese literature.

While immigrants took copies of their favourite texts as they travelled to other lands, as they settled, there was a growing demand for more fiction from China. Often, this demand led to the development of publishing houses in other countries. Not only were the works translated; they were also adapted into other fictions, often by anonymous translators and writers. Salmon notes that there was also a strong oral tradition, especially for the Cambodians and the Mongols. In such recitations, the bards would adapt the stories to local tastes. In Thailand, Bradley, an American missionary, set up the first printing press and published translations of Chinese texts in order to attract readers to his church so as to convert them to Christianity. But Salmon notes that there were no bookshops in Thailand and that Bradley only sold 1,000 copies of a book at most. Given this lack of outlets, it seems natural that the main influence on popular culture would be in the adaptation of Chinese texts into local literature, or the influence of Chinese aesthetic approaches in local literatures in imitations with Chinese settings or characters. She points out that by using Chinese settings, local writers especially in Korea could disguise their political messages as utopian guises.

While the book is geographically divided into sections, there is no material on the Philippines, Laos, or Burma. Salmon explains that no scholars in those countries could be found to undertake research. While most of the sections or chapters are rich in detail, it is unfortunate that the section on Thailand is only two pages. In fact, more information about Thailand is found in Salmon's Introduction than in the section written by the Thai scholar.

While such a lack of interest in these countries' scholars may reflect the political, social or economic realities in them in the 1980s, it would be surprising if that were the case today, what with the rise of China in the region. There are many opportunities for local scholars in these countries to develop their work in this field following the leads of the scholars of other countries whose extensive research is published in this book. In Thailand, with the explosion of schools and courses offering Chinese language, it may be that the study of the Chinese language may lead to a renewed popular interest in classic Chinese literature as a way of teaching Chinese. If, however, the local schools chose to follow the path followed by the teaching of English and just teach an instrumental approach to Chinese in order for students to get jobs, a great opportunity may be lost. The awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to two Chinese writers in the past fourteen years suggests that Chinese literature's vibrancy is in no way diminished and that many more great works are to come out of the country, partly as a reflection of its growing self-confidence and partly in response to the many challenges facing it in its modernization.

Literary Migrations is an unfinished story. The study of how creative literature has shaped international relations in the past may be only the first half of a story of how literature has continued to shape inter-cultural relationships even now. Perhaps, the English language schools may start to introduce English language creative literature back into their syllabuses in response to such a challenge . . . if it occurs. We can only dream of education systems teaching the ways literature and language interface each other and shape each other even in this overly-commercialised world that just teaches for tests and to train factory workers.

A Literature Model of Language Teaching? A Polemical Question

Abstract

Picking up on the word “model” in the title, this paper examines the aspects of language that may be viewed as artistic. It makes a case that we need to think and act artistically as teachers in order to enrich the language and the pedagogy we use with our students and colleagues. After describing some of the ways literature and language people interact or do not interact, the paper sets out three ways of explaining how language is itself an art: in everyday life, in linguistics and in pedagogy. It then describes some ways that some of our current practices are against the values inherent in artistic practice, and offers some remedies for this imbalance in our ways of talking to each other and our students, and in the ways we conceive of our action in the classroom. The tone of this paper is conversational, as part of the argument is that we need to recognize and develop our artistic voices in English Language Teaching.

What do we mean by a literature model? A model is usually something we make with our hands. An abstract model is something we make with our minds. Either way, there seems to be an implicit recognition in our language that a model is made by people, and is therefore a work of art. It is important that we remember this when we start to look for ways of analysing our field into pieces. Such acts are basically artistic. I am not sure that there is a single model of literature that I would offer as a way of teaching English. Literature is not a method. To claim that it is a method is to claim too much. But if we go to the other extreme and claim that it is only material—grist in the mill—for the teacher to use is to claim too little. Literature, I would suggest, offers an experience of language. It gives us voices in which to participate in a dialogue with each other. Another way of approaching this question of the place or role of a literature model in language teaching is to ask why we think that literature is a separate thing to language. It seems to me that if we start with an assumption that there is no difference between literature and language, we may come up with some new ways of thinking about ourselves and what we do. Such self-awareness is important for us as teachers. We need to see ourselves in the mirror sometimes in order to check what we are doing. And that image in the mirror is artistic. At present, I will argue, we seem to have stopped looking for these reflections or mediations. This may have resulted in several practices that threaten the effectiveness of our teaching. I want to suggest that an attempt to see ourselves in artistic ways offers insights in at least four areas where a reflective teacher

may grow by entering into the dialogue that I attempt to develop around the question of whether all language is artistic. In making this case, I hope to demonstrate that by considering language as an art we may make our own use of English better, think more creatively, be more critical of ourselves, and regain an understanding of the past as it still relates to what we are trying to do today. These reflections are important because we, the community of English teachers, are showing signs of developing a short-sighted disregard for qualities of language that we need in our drive for professional development and self-respect. If we don't have these qualities, we run the risk of becoming hypocritical in our practices. In addressing this threat, I would hope that we can draw from the well of literature an ethical view of ourselves as human beings, as teachers, and as speakers of language. In my mind, I cannot really disentangle these three roles. To create these reflections, I will now try to dramatize what I imagine may be a dialogue between the literature people and the language people. Arguably, the great divide between these two positions may only be a chimera or a false border that has done much harm to the study and the teaching of language. People have been making out cases for using literature to teach language ever since literature lost its privileged position, when the grammar / translation method was pushed aside by other methods towards the end of the nineteenth century and on into the modern era. How far we seem to have come since then may be illustrated by the point that then grammar study and literature were basically synonymous while now they are more often than not antonymous. By the nineteen thirties, the main force in this separation was modernism, with its insistence on difficult and fragmented verbal constructions that were taken by many readers as reality. Things were meant to be broken, not put together. Witness the names of some of the periodicals that played important parts in the development of these forces—*Blast* and *Vortex*. Somehow in the rush to progress, to be modern, the break between literature and language seemed acceptable as a necessary condition of thinking in a modern way. While modernist texts were then perceived to be difficult and therefore inaccessible or irrelevant, it was not a long leap to the conclusion that all literature was so. This idea survives in the more hostile responses of some teachers to a suggestion that authentic literary texts have a place in the language classroom. For these teachers, authentic texts are not L plus or minus 1 (cf. Krashen's idea of L+1), or they are simply not related to learning a language, and are therefore to be rejected. The problem with such extremism is that we tend to develop an intellectual deafness to what others have been saying, and amnesia about what we used to think and do in the past. Once this occurs, certain practices seem to proliferate: we stop reading or accepting anything that has not been published in the past seven or so years; teachers ask questions such as "Billows

who?" or "Who is Michael West?"; publishers sit on old classic texts such as those by Michael West and M.A.K. Halliday and refuse to republish them as they would not sell now—the market would perceive them to be obsolete because they are out of date or fashion; only a handful of conference goers attend sessions offered by internationally renowned writers when these writers try to spark an interest in what has been thought before; few of us seem to be interested in writing anything except textbooks and academic pieces of writing—probably under pressure for academic promotion; teachers believe and teach their students to believe the palpable nonsense that "old" writers such as Dickens write an English with different grammar and vocabulary than we do today; teachers become less skilled readers and writers—and consequently, I would argue, less skilled teachers; cultural understanding becomes flat and stereotypical, which is not too far removed from being racist; we start to believe that we now know all the answers—but this is only because we have stopped asking ourselves many questions about our own words and how we use them; language and literature are impoverished by being Balkanized or divided.

Given these practices and the issues raised by both the literature and the language proponents, there is much at stake in how we respond to language as literature and literature as language. The language we use must be a reflection of our own capacities as linguists and teachers. If we sell language short in our own professional discourses, then we will probably sell our students short by teaching them crabbed or crippled English that lacks aesthetic appeal or rhetorical force. Insofar as we fail in either of these areas, I would argue that we are in some ways failing as teachers. And this failure could have serious consequences for us and our students. By looking at how these two apparently separate worlds work as one, hopefully we can see some ways of realizing the synergies and exploiting the similarities between the two practices. The rejoining of the two streams into a single river should help improve our basic understanding of the nature of this language we profess to study, teach, and love. It should also help enrich our pedagogical, linguistic and literary practices. This, I would strongly suggest, must make ELT a better thing. But first we need to see that we are all on the same page, so to speak. And this brings me back to my point that we need to re-unite literature and language.

Three faces of language

The art of language as it pertains to the practices of ELT may be observed from at least three different perspectives: everyday usage, linguistics ideas, and pedagogical practices. By

perceiving the same thing from three different perspectives, perhaps we can develop a more rounded and comprehensive understanding of our art of teaching, and bring our profession out of the nineteenth-century old unity where literature dominated language, and out of the twentieth century where language divorced itself from literature by and large, and into the twenty-first century where a new configuration may be in the process of development. As we try to yoke together two things that seem to be disparate in our own consciousness, we should be aware that we are actually thinking and writing in metaphorical terms, artistically. In the metaphor, the two things become fused as one. For this reason, I am wary of offering an image of literature and language interfacing one another. While I am attracted by the masque-like effect of this image (in my mind's eye I see Janus's two faces being creatively inverted towards each other instead of away from each other) there remains what to me seems an unfortunate implication that the two faces are different. I am not so sure that literature and language are separate entities in practice. We need to find ways of putting the faces together, much as Picasso, Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot saw and represented the multiplicities of the individual. Then we may move beyond the post-traditional, premodern world of English language teaching as it is currently usually practiced. What we may be doing with a metaphorical metamorphosis or reconfiguration of the roles of literature and linguistics in English teaching is to realize or reanimate the idea or words we seem to have forgotten when we stopped going back to what has been said before. By returning to what has been written about our subject in the past, in what we like to call the literature, we often find material that has been neglected, ignored or forgotten—and this material can strike us as pertinent today. A case in point is the central term to this essay: the word "art". I would like to suggest that the practices of literature offer us ways of reanimating the old ideas about this word that all too often modern scientists among us dismiss as irrelevant. The word "art" comes from the Latin *ars*, which in turn comes from the classical Greek *techn* which meant "method". The Greek word sounds very much like our words "technique" or "technology". Nor should this surprise: artists in all the mediums have techniques, architects use technologies. Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht have both made cases for the technologies that shape all art in capitalism. McLuhan also talks of words as technologies—the medium as the message, which sounds like the idea that form is content. And that brings us back to the claim that all language is art.

1. Language as an art

Here, we need to explain some of the ways in which all language is an art in our everyday lives, in what could be characterized as either a sociolinguistic or a social-semiotic sense. The following points are raised to demonstrate that there are many ways of approaching our practices as art that we have yet to fit into the perhaps more narrow models we currently use when describing characteristics of our language. I am not advocating these points as a single, unified perspective that ties up all the loose ends into the next "one-best-way" of imprisoning language as the answer:

1. Words are metaphorical. The word "chair" is not a chair, but a sound picture that makes us see a chair. 2. The etymology of the word "literature" demonstrates that it is basically written language. 3. Language, as M.A.K. Halliday says, is "a natural human creation". And, of course, creation is an artistic act. 4. Another idea from Halliday is that our language grows with us. This would suggest that we cultivate our language, much as we cultivate the vine. Such cultivation seems to me to be a civilized art. 5. It follows from the previous point that as we grow we learn to liberate our language from its immediate social environment by changing it in the act of applying it to something, some task, for which it does not apparently seem intended. This act is artistic in two ways; it is imaginative as we have to see things that are not before us, and it is utopian when in our imaginary new uses, say, conversations that have yet to happen, we happily play with new words, expressions, attitudes as we rehearse them in our thoughts—we create ideal conditions and outcomes in our minds before we try our words out on others. 6. To speak "well" is an aesthetic act, choice and achievement that is shared at some level by everyone. Our voices are our most powerful art. Halliday stresses the artistic features of the voice when he comments on its musical, polyphonic make-up: "all speech other than the protolanguage of infancy is polyphonic: different melodies are kept going side by side, and each element in the sentence is like a chord which contributes something to all of them." 7. The ways to language are creative insofar as through or along them we create our culture, society, human spirit and identity. 8. All things that are made by us are artificial and therefore are works of art. Even Linguistics and the other disciplines are made and are therefore works of art. (Is it going too far to argue that the most stultifying, boring textbook is still a work of art—albeit a bad one?) This argument for art stems from William Morris and the folk-art people who know that when an artisan decorates the axe-handle or apron then that person is saying that he or she knows that tool or product is important and useful. The wood chopped with the wooden axe-

handle may become another, even more beautiful axe, an artifact. 9. An extension of this folk-thinking is made by Sapir when he writes: “It is the manifest form [of language] that is never twice the same, for this form, which we call linguistic morphology, is nothing more nor less than a collective art of thought, an art denuded of the irrelevancies of individual sentiment.” What makes this art possible is the view that “Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations.” He explains the technical aspects of this art: “Every language is a collective art of expression. There is concealed in it a particular set of aesthetic factors—phonetic, rhythmic, symbolic, morphological—which it does not share with every other language.” And finally he comes to the proto-sociolinguistic point that “Language is itself the collective art of expression, a summary of thousands upon thousands of individual intuitions. The individual goes lost in the collective creation, but his personal expression has left some trace in a certain give and flexibility that are inherent in all collective works of the human spirit.” 10. Writing is in a way a transformation of our vocal sound and words. There is a literary alchemy in this act that turns our words into things they were not—symbols and signs. This transformational power in language is basically artistic—an art strongly influenced by our religious impulses. The religious and artistic spirit or breath survives in the ideas of morphology. 11. As sounds and signs are arbitrary, so are they art. But it is a mistake to assume along with the post-modernists that the signs stay arbitrary. By using these signs to identify ourselves we are transforming an arbitrary, given thing into a product or a cultural practice, much as we transform an arbitrary tree into an axe or a book. 12. Once we use language to shape our group identity, we are transforming things by creating fictional versions of them. In doing this, we are transforming ourselves. All of this is artistic and creative. 13. By saying that language is more than one thing—a tool, a creative force, a system of organization, a way of thinking, a utopian model of social reality, an experience—we seem to be saying more: that language is an art. Only art does all these things without losing its specificity. Moreover, we seem to be suggesting that our ways of visualizing language, representing it, discussing it, shaping it, are artistic. 14. Insofar as language is a game we play as we learn to move in our world, then language has a sense of lightness that may be linked to the role of the imagination in our everyday lives and activities.

The role of the imagination in how we put our world and our experience into words needs to be recognized and considered in Applied Linguistics. This means that we need to open up how we conceive of our theories and beliefs as teachers and students of language. What follows is an attempt to reconsider some aspects of Linguistics in a new light—as art.

2. Linguistics practices as art

The next step is to investigate the ways that the practice of Linguistics may be seen as an art. The flow of the argument is that if language is an art, then whenever we use language to study language we are practicing an art. The mirror-like quality of our art may be sensed in the ring of doubleness in the chunk of words "language about language". In the age of reason, most writers simply knew that all rational thinking was scientific. That was a basic cultural assumption which made the world liveable then. The unfortunate implication is: We should study everything objectively, scientifically, while forgetting that all science is simply a method, just like every other art. By looking at the irony implicit in the claims of rigorous science we may relax about the adversarial positions that seem to be taken by both sides.

1. The distinction between art and science is fictitious. There are many beautiful models that are caste in the scientific genres; some of them are even entertaining. In so far as every language and every user of language divides the world and establishes categories or classes of experience simply by using words, then every language and user shapes the world and the words used as tools in it—and that is an artistic, creative activity. It could also be said to be poetic, in the Greek sense of the poet as a maker. 2. Linguistics does not claim to interpret language, language with a small l. It does not try to tell us what language means. Instead, it tells us what Language with a large L, as a concept, means. I am not rehashing here the arguments about syntagmatic and diachronic approaches that the Structuralists and the Post-Structuralists tried to use to divide language against the wishes and expressed intentions of the authority they all misrepresented to do this (Saussure). Nor do Linguistics people offer to translate language. These are artistic activities, and as such they are literary. Here, the linguistics camp seems to be defining itself as the people who do not try to be artistic or creative . . . a curious badge to proffer for any thinking person. Behind the apparently disarming rhetorical implication that I am telling the truth because I am speaking without art is the ironic sense that that too is an artistic achievement. Only great artists can get away with such an ironic view, just as only great singers can pull off singing badly. 3. In Second Language Acquisition studies, the transfer of L1 words or grammatical patterns could be read as versions of parody or comic play—but it isn't. The need to imitate sounds and patterns in order to be recognized as a speaker of a language initially requires a playful willingness to accept the fact that one will sound slightly ridiculous. The learner also needs to justify transforming his or her own language into the target language. The psychological barrier to such a make-over is often affected by excusing the act as parody. This claim for the

artistic acts of mimesis and parody would appear not to be serious. Scientific seriousness that does not recognize these acts may mask the learner's insecurity when he or she does not want to be laughed at in a foreign language. This insecurity inhibits our creativity. Why is this laughter taboo? Why is it all too often dismissed as flim-flam or padding? Where is the linguistics of laughter and comedy? This comic response will be raised again in relation to metaphors adapted from novels that are used to express possible student roles in the class room. 4. In the arena of World Englishes, where non-native English speakers are encouraged to artistically adapt English to their own brand of Singlish, Thaiglish, or Inglish, there is a critique of the power of English. What has not been explored so far is the rise of parody in such a critique—the more powerful any language becomes, the more open it is to being imitated, parodied, mocked. This humour is usually missing in the speech of many prestige users of the power-language. I must admit that the current gurus of World Englishes seem very staunch, at the cost of some sense of lightness of touch in their discourses that are basically unreadable to many outside of the educated elite they claim to attack. This irony is unfortunate as the more seriously and therefore hypocritically the language views itself, the more destructive will be the laughter. This laughter has been hidden in Western cultures for too long. It is possible that at the heart of the Western quest for language is an untold secret: the crumbling of the Tower of Babel may have been the result of God's laughter, not his anger. The more we try to repress a part of language, the more powerful it seems to become as an underground force. Its eventual eruption is all the more powerful. 5. Is there any such thing as a "non-artistic shape"? Isn't that term oxymoronic if we understand shape as an artistic characteristic? It could be argued that all models, as shapes, are inherently architectural and sculptural—and therefore artistic. The use of models in Second Language Acquisition studies reflects this basic artistic, even aesthetic, urge in even the most scientifically minded of us. 6. In psycho-linguistics we seem to be saying that we want to know how the brain works as a language storage and retrieval system or as a transformative-generative machine. But it seems to me that this is just studying a phenomenon, not a cause. So, when we give such phenomena *a priori* conditions as chemical patterns, we may be taking signs for wonders and missing the point that such a project is fundamentally an artistic conception: language artistically reflects the brain patterns in a mimetic sense. By turning our backs on the centuries of interpretive experience in the practices of mimesis, we are missing the point that words reflect the ways of the brain as an organism. Our refusal to admit to the fundamentally artistic practice of psychology may explain why we haven't progressed far in finding anything very useful in our "non-art". 7. Paradoxically, the chemical actions of our

brain that somehow store our "memory" of words, or even our creative faculties, may be understood scientifically. But to say that these storage areas and chemical ferment are language—the thing itself—seems faulty logic. It is tantamount to saying that the production plant is the product made in the plant. Such a statement may be fancy rhetoric, but it is hardly an objective scientific way of thinking. Analogy is more of an art than what we now like to call a science. QED: scientific discourse and thought ultimately disembogue into artistic expression. And this is only natural when all language is artistic.

While these points may suggest that there is a case for seeing Linguistics as an art, we should also recognize that our refusal to address these qualities may cause a blindness to the aesthetic values which seem to drive the students and teachers who want "good" English. It is difficult to see how, given the current divisions or sub-disciplines in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, we can address in a straight forward and methodical way the major effects every teacher and student wants to know about and produce or create. Concretely, as a teacher I want to know what makes language: ► clear ► effective ► beautiful ► powerful ► usable.

I am not convinced that much progress has been made towards providing techniques for helping us create this language in our own worlds of experience. Nor do I think we will develop such techniques while our discipline is divided into literature and language studies fragments. We should be learning how to utilize the artistic energy of our teaching tools. This brings me to the art of learning.

3. The art of teaching and teacher education

Once we as students or teachers take what we have "learned" or been "taught" in a classroom outside and try to put it into practice by experimenting with it in an artistic (playful or not) way, we don't seem to approach the act as a test-tube exercise—we perform it as an art . . . intuitively, emotionally, imaginatively, tentatively, personally, flexibly, creatively. And once it works and we are inspired to go on, we learn how to do it ourselves, as every artist must so learn to create—independently. The drive to create or actualize ourselves in language is fundamental to our motivation to learn and to develop our language. We underestimate or ignore this power to our detriment as teachers. If we are going to try to teach this art, then I believe it should be through fostering a profound humanistic milieu. To bring this about, we need to round ourselves and to relax about ourselves. One way to approach this building of our world is by not taking ourselves so seriously as we seem to do all the time. This is one of Erasmus's lessons. Against the seriousness of those who speak in the voice of science, we

need to balance the comic, or at least light-hearted, voices of art. This balance needs to be addressed in the dialogues of Applied Linguistics. We should study how to develop the comedy of learning, with its discovery scenes, reconciliations and sometimes foolish laughter. And to do this will require teachers who are able to facilitate the students' artistic expectations and productions—such teachers will lead by example. They will not hypocritically impose practices on students that they, the teachers, are incapable of demonstrating. Our job is not to program our students' brains, but to elicit, interpret, appreciate, evaluate and critique our students' performances in English. These actions require literary critical skills. And these skills are not being prominently featured in any MA in TESOL as far as I am aware. What is at issue seems to me to be important in the evaluation process, and it is something our students know and believe, even if we ignore it. It is the beauty of the voice, written or spoken. If I can't recognize the beauty of my students' voices, how can I recognize the student in English as an autonomous creative person instead of seeing him or her as a machine? How can I understand that student's basically aesthetic priority to have an attractive English speaking voice? When we can teach our student-teachers to be aware of the power offered by art, especially the power to change what is presented as set in stone, then that student-teacher is on the way to developing flexible, interesting and effective approaches to teaching and learning. If language really is an art, then it seems common sense to say that the practice of it should also be an art. And if that is so, then shouldn't we be teaching it and learning it in ways and contexts that are evaluated in artistic terms? That we are not so doing is suggested by the absence of references to titles such as "The Art of Teaching" in the bibliographies of Jeremy Harmer, Penny Ur, or Tricia Hedge, arguably the three most important textbook writers on ELT methodologies over the past decade. That there are many references to this art in the literature begs the question of why these references are silenced in the current debates. My answer to this question is that such works are ignored or left out as they are old or "out of date". However, when we look at the frequency and density of distribution of words drawn from art in the lexicon of our profession (for instance, "performance", "role-play", "tone", "pitch", "genre approaches", "pattern", "discourse", "dialogue") we should not be asking, "Why should we use literature in language teaching?" but, "Why can't we see that as language users and teachers we are all artists and act accordingly?" These words in our metalanguage—a language-game created by academics—suggest at least some subconscious artistic frames of reference in our professional lexicon. It stands to reason that anyone using these words should be aware of the powerful artistic reverberations in his or her language and activities as a teacher. When we

are deaf or insensitive to these possibilities, we are in danger of succumbing to cant or techno-speak. And that, it seems to me, is another form of hypocrisy. Such a lack of awareness of the tools we use, our instruments to create art, is still art—only bad art or self-defeating irony. This is not an argument against science or the use of scientific ideas. I have actually been arguing that science and art are indistinguishable as language. However, there has been an imbalance in the literature concerning the need for scientific usage of English in our pedagogy. I only seek to remedy this imbalance here by stressing that there are other viable ways of looking at our scientific approaches. As techniques, art and science are not necessarily antagonistic. In fact, I would hope that both perceptions are capable of enriching each other. And that will benefit our pedagogy.

My main concern is that as teachers we should be thinking in an appropriate and productive context of what we are learning to do: the art of learning and teaching English. Until we can do this, I fear that there will remain a basic hypocrisy in our profession, and that this hypocrisy ("do as I say, not as I do") creates confusion in the more perceptive students. Such conflicting responses may lead to a crisis in confidence within the classroom where teachers are alienated from the experience of their students by not sharing the feel for what should be the common endeavour in the language learning experience—the pursuit of effective English. But before we can arrive at this point, there are many aspects of our pedagogy that need to be reconsidered in terms of their art. How artistic activity translates into the learner's experience has yet to be developed very far in ELT. Until we have a profession that appreciates itself and is confident as a guild of artists, not as a cabal of technologists without creative impulses who at best deny their artistic possession, then the proposal of new artistic models that fully utilize literature not only as a resource, but as a way of life, will probably lack a wide receptive audience. I am aware that until we can recognize the artistic qualities inherent in our perceptions of language in everyday life and in our theoretical practices as linguists, that the barriers to such agreement will resist a more holistic view of language as, at least, not just a thing, but a beautiful thing. As a stimulus for discussion, I would now like to offer some hints for new and creative formulations of the learner's role in English. These hints are necessarily impressionistic or broad-brushed, as I want to avoid sounding dogmatic or overconfident. I see little justification in either of those attitudes given the current flux in ELT as I have tried to describe it. The view of the learner as an artist is important because the more the learner feels ownership of the language being learned, the more he or she will be motivated to learn and develop the language—to make the language his or her own, much as a poet makes the world. This ownership will metamorphose

not just how we learn and teach English, but necessarily, as a result of that experience, the English we create as we learn. Some ways literary experience may be used to frame and to interpret the learner's language performance in our pedagogy are:

1. We know that good learners immerse themselves in what they do. When this is applied to language, we come up against a host of problems that relate to the confidence bump. Basically, a learner has to believe that he or she can already perform in the target language in order to be motivated enough to learn how to perform in the language. That is not a paradox. It is positive imaging practice. We are actually trying to encourage the learner to do what, according to Coleridge, every good reader of artistic works does—suspend disbelief. The necessary fiction is that the language being learnt and used is already real and working. It is not enough for the teacher to know or believe this is true. The students must know this for themselves. To operate in such an ambiguous environment, in what seems to be a utopian world, is not easy to conceive of, let alone to sustain. One way to prepare the student to make this leap is by developing in the student a love of reading about such fictive, utopian worlds and a willingness to undergo such suspended disbelief in the reading experience.
2. We should try to think of our students in metaphorical terms, at least sometimes. As a comic touch, which is designed to provoke a sense of parody in the learner, I try to encourage my students to think of the relationship between Dr Victor Frankenstein and the monster he creates when we read *Frankenstein*: # The students are creating their own version of this monster when they try to speak in English; I am the mad doctor trying to give them life in a foreign tongue; they should embrace their performance, not reject it. # The scripts they scrawl are acceptable with all the mistakes and the ugly blemishes of words crossed out. # Like Victor Frankenstein who raids morgues and graveyards for material to build his new Adam / monster, we teachers raid the graveyards of dead ideas, the textbooks of ELT, looking for any body parts that we can sling together in our monster lesson plans. # Our students' voices are things of wonder, not ugly monstrosities that should be corrected and deformed in the name of some foreign, metropolitan, idea of what is acceptable. # Another metaphor could be the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde split personality. We are always someone else when we work in a foreign language—we have our masks and our magic potions or scientific experiments. This model is especially useful in helping the shy student suspend disbelief by acting as though he is confident. Soon enough, the appearance becomes the reality.

3. The voice is an aesthetic presence, whether that voice is written or spoken. We know that our students are painfully self-conscious about this when they are reluctant to sound ugly / stupid by speaking English in a way that to their ears is unpleasant. Singing in English is a way to get past these insecurities and to develop an aesthetic feel for English in our students. Why do we not give emphasis to students reading their work aloud in class? Is it that we don't want to hear their tortured voices as we think we can't do anything about them? If so, then we are abandoning our students at the very point they most need our help. We should be encouraging them to listen to how people read. This will help them to develop their inner voices in English, which will in turn encourage them to develop their personal voices in writing and speaking. We may be losing the oral arts of reciting and lecturing.

4. It seems to be characteristic of artists that they do not take themselves too seriously. They are willing to laugh at themselves and to play the fool: # The simplicity of communicating gets lost when we burden ourselves with massive textbooks overfilled with advice that no one really can take in except in the most mechanical short-term ways. # By laughing at ourselves, we may find new ways of thinking about what we do. # We may also be more willing to change, to be less conservative. Being funny and clever are not mutually exclusive states. # The disruptive power of humour can help us to at least look at other possible ways of thinking about what we do as teachers. Laughter and folly can be cathartic and liberating forces that may help us to clear away much of the theory-driven bits and pieces—body-parts—that litter the floor of ELT at present.

I hope in these discussions of some ways to help our students perceive their own roles in the learning process that I have provided enough examples to demonstrate how we can and should be focusing on how to foster the students' development of a creative, critical spirit in which good English is valued and appreciated as an empowering skill that enables the students to sense their vital relationships with the roots of the language they are studying and its essential critical spirit. It is this spirit that I have tried to draw attention to in my dramatization of the dialogue that should be occurring between the literature and the language people.

But . . . As a result of the forced divisions between literature and language, I am worried that certain practices have developed which, if left unchecked, will threaten our effectiveness as teachers. By turning a blind eye to the merits of good language and artistic practices, we may have unwittingly encouraged a passive acceptance of mediocre language

usage in our profession. The danger is that once we accept our language and its usage as necessarily unimaginative and unattractive, we start to teach that belief to our students. The implication is, speaking personally, that whenever I had a teacher who did not love the subject being taught, I had a bad teacher for that subject. By seeing the teacher and the student as artists in the language we may avoid such cold, and therefore harmful, responses to language.

What follows is a series of questions which are intended to highlight some of the areas in ELT where an avoidance of, or a lack of appreciation for, the artistic faces of language may have negatively influenced our own English language use:

1. How many of us can, and / or do, read a full-length novel in English and discuss it meaningfully with students and colleagues?
2. How many of us can actually write an essay?
3. Why are there so few essays written in our field of ELT? (We have many "articles" and "reports", whatever they are.)
4. How many of us keep a journal of any sort?
5. How many of us attend dramatic performances or poetry readings?
6. How many of us are in reading circles?
7. How many of us see any films apart from the most recent blockbusters?
8. Are we sensitive to the danger of demotivating our students by shoving literature down their throats in jumble exercises and tests? (Is there really much difference to the bad old ways of shoving Shakespeare down students' throats?)
9. How many of us write letters to the editors of newspapers?
10. How many of us are confident to read aloud to others?
11. How many of us actually love this language that we study and teach?
12. Are there many Masters level programs that offer courses on "The Art of Teaching", "The Art of Reading", "The Art of Writing", etc.?
13. Can we evaluate textbooks as works of art?

It seems that these acts are basically literary. If we don't practice them then are we not weakening ourselves as language users? And are we not failing to do the very things our pedagogical theories encourage us to facilitate in our students? If we don't practice what we teach, does that make us hypocrites, at least in the eyes of some of our students? If we can't do these things, how can we hope to teach our students to do them? I believe that these are important questions. Hopefully we can answer yes to a number of the items in the

aforementioned list which is not meant to be complete or definitive. By approaching our tasks as teachers from an artistic perspective we may remedy many of the problems that seem to mark our work at times as unimaginative, boring, rigid, dogmatic, or at least demotivating to ourselves and to our students. Our language should improve from a new emphasis on its aesthetic effect as beautiful, powerful, effective, clear and usable. I would now like to turn to an appreciation of some of the positive qualities offered by an artistic pedagogy. In making this gesture, I am offering an open-endedness to the debate. I am aware that in the literature of our field such open-endedness is frowned upon as loose-structured. But, I for one find such endings aesthetically appealing. We already have too many articles that seek to box the reader into a false sense of certainty, conclusiveness and authoritarian control. Such "well-made" structures can often be boring and too limiting by denying the reader a possibility for involvement in the future development of the text being read. Such closed texts are more appropriate in the critical realism of textbooks, and not so useful in modern approaches to the use of language. We should be trying to open our learners' minds and our classrooms, not close them.

Coda

If, in trying to voice creatively or to dramatize the silent or invisible dialogues I hear around me throughout the ELT world, I have managed to generate a vision of possibilities of how things need not be the way we currently see them, and if I have managed to share my enthusiasm for the hopes held out by meaningful discourse in our profession, a discourse that is well-rounded, and not distorted by divisive segregation, then perhaps a reasonable conclusion would be that we can be more creative and imaginative in how we talk to each other and to our students. Then, and only then, will we be sensing a breakthrough in how we conceive of ourselves as teachers of English, as artists worthy of the respect and admiration of others. My trust in the artistic and playful characteristics of teachers makes me confident that the task of being creative is not too much. However, to feel relaxed enough to respond in this way, the present divides between the art and the science of language teaching and the study of English need to be bridged. So too must we reach back to hear what has been written in the past that has shaped our practices now. To stress this activity, I have deliberately limited myself to trying to re-voice some of the ideas of Sapir and Halliday—ideas that I feel may have been pushed aside when we overlook some of their less easily subsumed thoughts for the sake of conformity or simplification in our textbooks. The writers of these foundation

texts are still in touch with the voices of art. Such contact enriches these writers' work. We should remember our origins in their work, in their language. By bringing these voices back to life we are performing a literary act. We are also conceiving of our use of language as a concrete practice—as a dialogue or dramatization of arguments and dreams from other times and places. In such literary activities we may make consistent our views of language, pedagogy and how we know ourselves. Such a unity may heal the divide between us. By putting back together the voices of literature and language, by putting them together in a dramatic dialogue, we will have built something worthwhile, interesting and imaginative—and we will have done it in a creative way. What exactly will happen in that artistic future world is anyone's guess. Perhaps someone will write a utopian novel about the issues raised in this essay. Such a novel would be an interesting alternative to the boring and unimaginative textbooks we too often warp our sensibilities with at present. I hope that if we can carry on dialogue in an open-ended, pluralistic way, we will create an atmosphere where we will feel confident to take that leap into the creative aspects of language and ELT. But, if we as teachers all sound the same—out of a misplaced confidence in a unified single voice of a drab, Gradgrindish scientific certainty—we may develop a pedantic drone in our classroom and conference voices. Such a drone will be counter-productive in our teaching and communication, where it really matters. When we have our own voices, and can celebrate them—when we have our own ways of expressing our ideas and dreams—there is hope for our profession. Then we are artists in our field. Without this creative outburst, I hear only the silence that sadly characterizes too many situations in the ELT world. With confidence in our art we may start writing free-flowing essays again, and keeping journals of our adventures in the classroom. This is a world I want to realize—utopian though it may seem.

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Ecology and the Language of the Novel

Abstract

While not arguing that literary criticism should be a social science, there is an argument to be made that the writing and reading of literature, and the novel in particular, are social acts. Societies, cultures and relationships are shaped, expressed and interpreted in language which is used to communicate with others. Looked at sociologically, anthropologically, linguistically or critically, this is what novels do. Novels are not merely abstract grammar rules or theories; they are instances of how we use language in the real world–and the writing and reading of novels are real-world acts–for communicative purposes as we create ideational meanings, interpersonal relationships and texts. In any actual communication, meaning is not just in the sender or the receiver of a message; it is in the relationships between all the participants in the process. For the novel, this network of participants is comprised of the writers, narrators, characters, readers, critics and students who study the novels. In this view, writers and readers are real people, not hyperreal concoctions or theoretical abstractions. We at present lack a body of research that talks to others in ways that help us to expand our knowledge of specific texts as communicative networks. It is suggested that one way we can approach this task is through a better understanding of ethnography and ethnomethodology as literary actions. To do any meaningful ethnography, we need to see the texts we study as ecosystems as well as understand that language is also an ecosystem, as are all the particular instances of it in each novel or communicative context. When we see and hear texts, we experience them as human creations, but to do these things we need to actually see and hear them on their own terms, not through the blinkers of Theory. We can do this best when we participate in the communication from inside the situation in an ethical way that respects the language of the other participants. It also requires us to provide "thick" data in our ethnography which comes from the participants in the text and a way of analysing that data that is commensurate with the actual language we find in the texts.

Keywords: ecology, ecocriticism, ecolinguistics, ethnography, ethnomethodology, communication, communicative competence, social context, novels, research methodology.

Note on the style of writing in this article

One of my communicative intentions in writing this article is to communicate with my readers, many of whom are students whose first language is not English. Their cultures are firmly oral. I want to motivate them to think and to feel as they do so in a foreign language. One feature of spoken language is its redundancy. In this essay, there are several repetitions of key ideas. This seems to me to be justified when the context in which they are being repeated is new in the text. This redundancy is a way of creating feedback within the text that expands points made earlier or elsewhere. Hopefully, this conversational tone carries much of the interpersonal relationship I hope to have with my readers as I communicate my ideational meanings in the acoustic space of my text. The repetitions sounded here will hopefully refer the reader back anaphorically into the text to earlier soundings of ideas and emotions. While some academics may find this attempt to enliven the written voice distasteful, I can only hope that they will open their minds to what I am trying to say. Speech keeps us grounded in our bodies and so is a way of resisting the dualistic splitting of mind and body that I see too often in conventional academic discourse. When we speak, we keep our language alive; once we stop speaking, our language is on the way to extinction.

As a mark of respect to other writers who I am trying to communicate with and through, I have included long quotations of their words, so that they can speak in their own voices; not just through my ventriloquism which could distort their ideas through paraphrasing them. I have also kept the same size of print for their words as I use for mine. It may just be a publishing convention to save space, but it often annoys me when I see passages from other writers squashed down in print size and space. In resisting this convention, I am stressing my concern for the visual environment of my text which has been shaped by the ways I construe my relationships with dialogue partners.

Finally: I deliberately use anthropomorphisms when referring to things in the novel. To do otherwise would undermine my point that the novel is a living entity; it would also reinforce the duality between humans and nature that I am writing against when arguing for an ecology of the novel.

Introduction

The logician's dream that men should communicate only by unambiguous digital signals has not come true and is not likely to. (Bateson: 1972, 418)

John Dewey, whose pragmatics and educational ideas have helped to shape much of twentieth century discourse on how we learn to use language to do things in the real world, saw art as experience:

> The senses are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the on-goings of the world about him. In this participation the varied wonder and splendour of the world are made actual for him in the qualities he experiences. The material cannot be opposed to action, for motor apparatus and "will" itself are the means by which this participation are carried on and directed. It cannot be opposed to "intellect." For mind is the means by which participation is rendered fruitful through sense, by which meanings and values are extracted, retained, and put to further service in the intercourse of the live creature with his surroundings. Experience is the result, the sign and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment, which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication. Since sense-organs with their connected motor apparatus are the means of this participation, any and every derogation of them, whether practical or theoretical, is at once effect and cause of a narrowed and dulled life-experience. Oppositions of mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh, all have their origin, fundamentally, in fear of what life may bring forth. They are marks of contraction and withdrawal. Full recognition, therefore, of the continuity of the organs, needs and basic impulses of the human creature with his animal forbears, implies no necessary reduction of man to the level of the brutes. On the contrary, it makes possible the drawing of a ground-plan of human experience upon which is erected the superstructure of man's marvellous and distinguishing experience. What is distinctive in man makes it possible for him to sink below the level of the beasts. It also makes it possible for him to carry to new and unprecedented heights that unity of sense and impulse, of brain and eye and ear, that is exemplified in animal life, saturating it with the conscious meanings derived from communication and deliberate expression. (Dewey: 1934, 22–23)

Through the repetition of his keywords of “participation”, “organism”, “communication”, “environment”, and “experience” Dewey emphasizes ideas that will later be recognized as essential for how we use language in terms of our relationships with the ecosystems we inhabit. For the purposes of our study, the novel’s communication network may be understood as such an ecosystem.

While the present study focuses on the proper study of the novel in its social context and in terms of the communications we have when we read them as critics, it is important to point out that many of these ideas have implications for the study of how we learn to use language in other educational contexts. This extension into English teaching will have to wait for another occasion.

At present, our tasks are to make clear how the language of the novel may be fruitfully studied in terms of the social environment as that environment is realized in the novel, how that environment is ecological in nature, and the ways that an ecology of language is created and maintained through the communications between writers, narrators, readers, critics and students. In doing these things, we hope to make a contribution to the literature of ecolinguistics and ecocriticism by expanding the horizons they at present have which see the environment only as external to the language, as something that influences and is influenced by language. Instead, what we propose is that language and the novels we find them in are themselves environments.

When we start with the idea that language and the environment are inextricably mixed and that language is best understood in a social context, as say in Halliday’s (1978) ideas of the social semiotic of language, we are moving away from certain paradigms of science that have led to the mechanistic view of the world from which ideas of technical methods have been derived. We are also distancing ourselves from fundamentally mechanistic ideas of poststructuralism which seem to suggest that texts do not represent anything outside themselves, that texts have no meaning, and that langue, not parole, is the type of language to be studied.

How we have studied language or anything else for that matter since the time of Descartes has seemed to be a matter of finding a method suited to our preconception of the way language or other things we want to study work or are organized. The particular image we have of this organization allows us to develop ways of thinking about the things we study. If we think of things as machines or as communicatively dead objects then we study them mechanistically or abstractly.

There is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy in this. If I think of the world one way, and I develop a technique to study that world that is based on the way I see the world, then it should come as no surprise if the image or data produced by my technique resembles the world image I already had in my head before I studied it. I then use this data to support my original conception or image of the thing I set out to study. This is another way of saying that once we believe our theory is true, we only have to fit the evidence, if any, to the theory. This sounds more like paranoid thinking or circular logic than it does a way of doing research in the real world.

When we study or teach / learn methodology in a graduate program this imposition of a narrowly defined technique seems natural. Through it we learn how to belong to the particular research community we are meant to be contributing to. Our success in mastering a particular methodology is a large part of how we gain membership to the community we are becoming a part of. It should come as no surprise that we are not encouraged to question the paradigm or the first principles of the subject we are developing expertise in. And again, this seems understandable. If we question the foundations of the community we say we want to be members of we are actually implying that we do not want to be a part of that community but to change it. Every community, and a research community is no different in this, has its particular way of thinking and talking about the things it studies. This is the register of language that signifies our expertise and membership.

Because the ways we think and talk of our subject are entrenched in our social position within a research community, it is a hard and slow process to change the paradigm. Most such changes are usually seen as threats, errors or madness at first. This difficulty may be because when we change the ways we think and talk of things, we are also apparently changing ourselves. This seems so because we are who we say we are; we are, or at least we are in, the language that we use. Our language defines us. It seems that despite Bacon's and others efforts, we still basically accept truth in terms of consensus and the authority of other people: we can be comfortable in the knowledge that as we begin our search we already know we are right because we are doing what most others are doing in the dominant discourse we espouse our faith in. The ways we consent to the meaning of what we do is a part of how language seems to work. Without such agreement as to the meaning of words and structure, we have no language or community. Language builds our society and our society builds our language.

This mutual reinforcement, while being acceptable to any reasonable person, should not be taken at face value. While it seems to be a view that supports the way we do research,

and the ways we think and talk now in our communities, it need not be interpreted that way. If instead of accepting the conclusion as evidence for what we already do, we turn our attention to the statement as a hypothesis or supposition that we develop in another way, we may find that the actual conclusions that we reach seem to challenge the tenets of the way we see things in our present communities of scholars.

What makes such a turnabout possible is that the definition of language that we will develop here is not the definition of language that has been used to support the old paradigms of language since the seventeenth century. These paradigms are still there in Saussure's linguistics and in Chomsky's (2000) Cartesian view of "competence" in language that I have critiqued in *Chaos in the Classroom* (2009). These writers' views shape the basic division between texts and the social world we all live in. Our problem with the conception of language which we need to research and critique is that is rests on the idea of a dichotomy, a duality that we perhaps wrongly have come to believe is a basic principle in the world and in our scientific study of the world. This duality is also the shaping force in our current ways of researching and describing language. While we continue to conceive of language in terms of duality, we will view the world in terms of that duality too. Until we can find a way to language that is not premised on duality we probably will continue to see everything through the language-glasses of duality. This task is the most important research question as I see it in the study of language. Until we can find a way out of the labyrinth of this duality, we will not find other ways of seeing and talking about things or find a way to research that doesn't demand the splitting of science and the humanities into some kind of binary opposition that has impeded thought for too long.

The need to think in other ways remains to be done in the particular fields I am interested in here, that of language and society or sociolinguistics and the research of culture and language or the humanities. Not that I see the two areas as fundamentally different or in any binary relationship. They need not be seen in such terms. In fact, if we continue to think of language and society as different or of language as a separate part of society, we will not be able to think our ways out of the labyrinth of duality because we will probably continue to study language in the dualistic ways we have been studying it for centuries that reinforce our image of language as a part of a whole that is still separable in our methodological approaches to the study of language as a thing. It is this idea of "thinghood" that needs to be critiqued or even ultimately ignored if we are to find new and better ways to language that do not inevitably produce the image of a dualistic world of thought that has limited our research for too long. While we think in the old dualistic and linear ways, we will continue to see

things the way we see them now instead of developing another vision of our subject that offers new insights and possibilities to us as students of literature, language and the teaching of language.

The questions we may develop from our new vision may have important ramifications for the ways we understand our cultures, languages, literatures and the ways we teach or communicate and create them.

Language as an ecosystem

The vision we need to embrace is that language is not only understandable as a part of a larger ecosystem, but as an ecosystem itself. In recent linguistics we have talked of language in terms of webs and trees (webs of words and tree diagrams) which imply that we see language within something else, as a microcosm or as a subsidiary thing. To these images or metaphors, I have argued elsewhere (Conlon, 2003) that we also should add language as a fluid or as water. Up to a point, my own metaphor remains only a partial image that still operates or works to lock language into the role of a thing inside another thing and so to the basic duality-trap that I now see it is necessary to think our way out of.

One way out is to suggest that language is an ecosystem as such. Whether that ecosystem turns out to be related to other ecosystems or is within another ecosystem remains to be seen. When we come to discussing the classroom where we learn most of our ways of writing about literature as an ecosystem and to suggest that we can fruitfully envisage an ecology of education (Conlon, 2009), perhaps along the lines of Bateson (2007) who argues for an ecology of mind, we will have to consider the limitations of our metaphor again. But for now, I would suggest that such a vision of education seems unthinkable without the idea that language too may be an ecosystem and that the classroom environment may well be included in that ecosystem, and not the other way round. We should keep in mind that what we are dealing with here is a metaphor and that metaphor serves as a theory, at least in the initial stages of our thinking. Even if it turns out that our metaphor has only aesthetic or artistic appeal, such an appeal would satisfy me insofar as it may be a defensible idea in the humanities' way of doing research insofar as we need to be creative and artistic in our study of literature.

As Midgley (2002) argues, we have been concerned, often harmfully, with the debates over the place of science and the humanities in each other. We have found that science and the humanities have been seen as mutually exclusive by most thinkers. One reason for this

difference is that the concept of science understood by the protagonists in the debates is basically Cartesian. If we can develop a concept of science more in line with recent developments in the rethinking about science we may overcome the fundamental opposition between art and science that has existed, at least in Western thought, for the past three hundred years. Until we have a better understanding of science, we will continue trying to put the pieces back together again and will fail because it is not in the jigsaw pieces that the resolution lies.

What we have to recognize is that when we are looking at verbal art, or more specifically at novels and other creative forms of language, we are not working with a literary system that is in opposition to the linguistic system. And we must likewise accept or understand that when we look at the linguistic system in art we are not looking at that system as fundamentally in opposition to the literary system. As Lodge (1966, 79) points out, "all literary structure is language, all plots are plots of language." The linguistic system may be in a network relationship with the literary system in a poem or novel and the literary system may also be in a network relationship with the linguistic system at the same time. What makes them synergize is that the basic reality of any novel is its communicative function. Both of these systems are symbiotic in a way that we have yet to understand. The particular ecosystem of words needs to be understood while realizing that each such ecosystem is also particular to the work of art it may be found in. We have to learn to think of a work of art as a particular ecosystem while also understanding it in terms of the ways the ecosystem of the Novel operates or functions. But at the same time, we should accept the possibility that there are not two systems at work, that the sum of the parts are greater than the whole in any ecosystem.

When and if we can bring together the new ways of science which offer a more holistic and open approach to knowledge, we may bring poetry and science together again. If there is an ecosystemic way of understanding language and literature then we must not expect that one part of that system will predominate over other parts or features in the ecosystem. While we continue to try to see poetry only in terms of Science or science only in terms of Art or Poetry we will continue to misunderstand the ecosystem because we will continue to think in terms of paradigms which hegemonically divide the world and its aspects into separate units through an analytical method that is basically anti-humanistic and one-sided.

Another way of expressing the goal for our research and the ways we need to undertake that research is to look for a metaphor . . . kaleidoscope, not microscope, telescope

or glasses / bifocals. This metaphor is suggested by Whorf (1956, 213) when he explains that we can never be objective in describing the world we live in:

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.

Insofar as this kaleidoscopic flux is the data we have to understand when we read novels, we may also need an image of the way words are organized that is more multi-dimensional than the flat two dimensions of the structuralist vertical and horizontal axes. The chronotope or space / time aspect of words as espoused by Bakhtin (1981) tells us much about the linguistic environment (Conlon, 2012): words in texts exist in space and time. If we are to take into account the space / time continuum which suggests that the two dimensions are not as separable as the two axis model suggests they are, and if we are to seek a deeper, more fleshed out dimensionality to words, we must look for these other aspects of language.

One other limitation in this view of language is that it seems to over-emphasize the visual quality of a text; the aurality of a text, especially one that records spoken words, needs an extension of the kaleidoscope as a metaphor to take account of the acoustic space in a text. Once we can conceive of an oral kaleidoscope, much as Bakhtin (1929) hears "polyphony" in the multi-voiced texts of Dostoevsky, we can start to hear as well as see the communication between participants in a novel.

When we remain focused on the linearity of language, vertical or horizontal, we are also working in a basically visual Euclidean geometry. We need another geometry, one that allows for more than two variables or sides to be seen at a time. This is the function of a kaleidoscopic perspective. It may be that we have such an alternative in fractal geometry (Conlon, 2009 and 2012).

Another necessity is to define what we are looking for with our new method. It seems, at least in quantitative applied linguistics which follows the Cartesian lines, that there is only frequency, distribution and mass / volume that are used as units of measurement and

meaning. This locks us into a histogram that remains linear or a two dimensional curve on an x/y axis. Such graphs and charts tell us little about each person's actual state of mind when he/she is communicating in the language being studied. Instead, we have means and standard distributions that remain rounded and biased towards frequencies of response. They tell us little about the qualities of the choices reflected in the graphs and charts.

Apart from frequency and mass, we need to consider the possibility of observing other aspects of language: the velocity of words, their tonal aspects, their opaqueness or transparency, their vocalized or sub-vocalized relations with each other, intermentally or intramentally etc. as they are used by people in realized communicative situations.

Traditional grammar, which is marked by the Cartesian view of nature, sees the grapheme, morpheme, syllable, phrase, clause and sentence as a finite straight line. Chomskian grammar also remains bound by the sentence. Such grammars are not good at describing or explaining the dynamics of language beyond the sentence. They cannot account for the ways subsequent grammar that exists in other sentences anaphorically can change the sense of the grammar of a preceding (past) sentence. Nor can such a grammar lead us to a deeper awareness of the semantics or phonology of the language being studied. It seems then that such grammars are of little use in the development of an ecolinguistic view of language as a whole.

From linguistics, we need to borrow more than these divisions by looking at the possibilities of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. What such approaches offer are insights into how texts and discourses form loops and feedback networks that can explain more about how language embodies or exists on more than one level. Language is not simply a logical system; it must be able to say concrete or actual as well as abstract things about the mind, matter and life as we use language in our communication with each other. The relationships between language and these other three aspects of meaning may only be explicable in a deep and meaningful way in terms of the environment of words that form and are formed by a text or discourse.

We also need to consider how we can better understand the ways text and discourse are transformed and transform themselves and other texts. This means that we need a better way of studying intertextual aspects such as allusions and whether exophoric references are enough to describe such links between words in different texts in individual writers' *oeuvres* and between the works of different writers.

But the greatest challenge I see for the study of language is to tackle the issue of inner speech. Within the mind, we may find yet another ecosystem that is turbulent and non-linear

(Conlon, 2012). We can conceptualize inner speech as a communicative act with ourselves, as in Vygotsky's (1987) intramentality. This seems to be what we do when we read a novel. We are communicating with ourselves and at the same time with the writer, narrator and characters in what we read. This creates a literary form of the zone of proximal development which explains how we learn language in social contexts and grounds the study and teaching of literature in the same social context.

Literature and ethnography

What research methods we use to develop such insights need to be discussed. When we come to accept that not all poets are hopeless sentimentalists and not all scientists are cold-blooded machines, we may relax our boundaries between the two opposing camps of the social sciences and the humanities and nurture an environment in which we can actually talk to each other as equals.

In this spirit, we may suggest that the practices of ethnography and ethnomethodology as found in sociolinguistics and anthropology offer ways of grounding our research in the language used by novelists, narrators, characters and critics to communicate with each other. Duranti (1997, 85) defines ethnography as the written description of the social organization, social activities, symbolic and material resources, and interpretive practices characteristic of a particular group of people. Such a description is typically produced by prolonged and direct participation in the social life of a community and implies two apparently contradictory qualities: (i) an ability to step back and distance oneself from one's own immediate culturally based reactions so as to achieve an acceptable degree of "objectivity" and (ii) the propensity to achieve sufficient identification with or empathy for the members of the group in order to provide an insider's perspective—what anthropologists call "the emic view".

Seen in this way, ethnography is the immersion of the researcher in the community through something that looks very similar to Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief". The critic's job is not to impose theories on the material or to come to the novel with preconceived ideas about what the novelist is meaning or doing. All we can reasonably say is that the novelists often try to communicate with others. These communicative acts may be understood as speech events.

Hymes (1964) lists eleven parts of what he calls a "communicative event": 1. Genre (stories, conversations, greetings, etc.) 2. Topic (what event participants are talking about) 3. Purpose (the function being performed by participants and what interaction goals they have in

communicating) 4. Setting (the physical environment in which participants communicate) 5. Key (the emotional tone participants use) 6. Participants (the age, gender, social status, ethnicity etc. of participants) 7. Message form (spoken, written, dialects used) 8. Message content (surface level or denotative message) 9. Sequence of acts (turn-taking, interrupting, openings, closings, changing topics, channel maintenance etc.) 10. Social rules invoked (politeness, rudeness, etc.) 11. Interpretative norms to be used or accounted for in understanding the participants shared knowledge, cultural beliefs etc. so as to decide what is to be focused on in the interpretation as literal or in need of interpretation by the researcher or the participants.

These are, by extension, all concerns of any literary critic who interprets or makes judgments on a novel: Who is talking to whom; where are they talking; when are they talking; why are they talking; and how do they talk or use language in their communication. They are also the fundamental concerns of an ethnographer. Saville-Troike (1989) lists the different sources of data that an ethnographer can use: 1. Introspection. These are the thoughts of the researcher usually recorded in a journal while in the research context. 2. Participant-observation. The researcher communicates with the other participants so as to understand what they do from their perspective. 3. Observation. The researcher remains outside the context as much as possible so as not to influence the communication being observed. This is not easy to do as we change what we see in the act of looking at it as an outsider because the participants are often self-consciously aware they are being looked at. 4. Interview. These are usually formal. Critics can do this by imaginatively constructing such interviews or they can read interviews done by the writer. In some cases, interviews are actually embedded in the novel, as when Raskolnikov is interviewed by the police in *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoevsky: 1867). 5. Ethnosemantics. This is the study of how experience is categorized by participants. We look at their terms for what is happening and what they understand as genres, events, types of language use, etc. 6. Philology. This is the traditional domain of literary criticism and historical linguistics. It looks at how language changes are shaped and how texts have been interpreted in the past by other or earlier members of the speech community. Novels that incorporate other text types within them, as many novels do, would provide examples of these texts as they relate to the text being studied by the critic. 7. Ethnomethodology. This is the study of "the methods used by social actors in interpreting their everyday life" (Duranti: 1997, 10). An interaction analysis is done of their conversations to understand how speakers use language to do things and to interpret others' language.

All seven of these ways of thinking are often done by the literary critic and the novelist. None of the methods used are necessarily theory-based; they are, instead, coming out of the material the literary critic studies: the novels. Insofar as these approaches are compatible with the social and linguistic environment they study, they may be said to be eco-friendly and ethically sound.

Instead of looking at language as a thing separate from us, as a product that somehow can be objectivized outside of us, we need to understand that language is about relationships, values, perceptions; it lives in us and we live in it because we use it to communicate with each other.

There are signs that within English teaching an environment is developing in which this new paradigm of language will make sense. As we come to see English as a *lingua franca* (ELF), much as Greek was a *lingua franca* in the Mediterranean basin and Latin was a *lingua franca* throughout the Roman Empire, we are seeing how language is being recognized as a self-organizing, self-regulating system and that to an extent this system is also self-generating. To understand this new environment we will have to study the other languages and the literatures of those languages (especially in writers of English language novels) which are shaping ELF. But we have to conduct this research with a new paradigm of the language of the novel, as the old paradigm won't work to explain exactly what is happening and how it is happening.

Each of the new Englishes is developing its own ecosystems and these systems are interacting with each other in ways we have not studied in the old two dimensional paradigm of language. If we continue to try to make our findings fit the old paradigm with its narrow Eurocentric views on native speaker-based grammar, phonology and semantics, we will distort our perceptions and limit the field of possibilities that this new ecological reality offers to us as researchers.

Instead of focusing on old models such as those implicit in native speaker English, we need to see these new environments from the beginning as much more complex systems of language that are functioning on many different levels at the same time. Describing each of these systems' grammars in terms of the old paradigm of grammar means that we are still trying to put new wine in old bottles or make the new worlds fit the old world perceptions, values and beliefs. All we will wind up doing in such outmoded thinking is making the facts fit our theories.

If we are to develop an ecology of language and ecologies of the novels we read, we need to see more than one thing at a time as ecosystems cannot be atomized or analysed into

parts. Each ecosystem exists in relation to other ecosystems, not by itself. What happens in one ecosystem affects other ecosystems. This is why we can no longer look at each of the old sciences in separation but must see them holistically and in connection with other ways of seeing that have traditionally been excluded from our fields of study. Whether bringing together art and science is a precondition to the healthy development of this new ecological view of language or literature or whether the ecological realities in our new field of ELF will make us bring these two opposing fields of knowledge together remains to be seen.

Once we commit ourselves to an ecological methodology then we accept the perception that has already been recognized in the ecological paradigm of the sciences. In deep ecology, values (social, cultural, psychological etc.) are inherent or fundamental in the things we research and in our experience of these things: we see that we are IN the ecosystem as we study it. This is a spiritual experience in which we identify the human subjects, ourselves included, with the natural environment we are ALWAYS in. Our role is to identify ourselves in this environment and this environment in ourselves. We do this by communicating with what we find in that environment.

In sociolinguistics, this means that we need to find ways of studying the many voices that are our own voice and the ways our voice shapes the voices of others. The goal of understanding our inner voice is foregrounded in such a focus. The methodology most suited to such a study is that of ethnography. To use such a method in the study of literature requires us to think of the critic, the reader and the novelist as ethnographers. The writer creates his or her world or society through describing the ways his or her narrators and characters communicate with each other so that the reader can enter that world also as an ethnographer to understand the ways all concerned communicate with each other. The critic who thinks this way would then need to write his or her own ethnographic narrative of the novel he or she has experienced or read.

As a student and teacher of language, my concern is to think of ways of bringing the fields of language together again so as to study the ecology of mind in language and the ecology of language in mind. Linguistics, literary criticism, cultural studies, the media all need to be re-thought in terms of the implications of ecology. By going back to the historical horizon, we may indeed be inviting Chaos at first. But this is not my ultimate intention. The complexities of our fields of vision require that we see many things at the same time and in new ways, out of the boxes we have put them in. Our capacity to think in such ways has been severely limited by the technological world view we have inherited from the old sciences which have encouraged us to think in one field at a time.

Some of the most important things we learn from reading literature are ways of seeing and hearing the voices of others within ourselves, and ourselves in others. We are not machines, but people who live in communication networks of flows, relationships, ideas and beliefs that can only be understood together, not apart. But this should not be taken to imply that we need a new unified humanity. We are more than one thing at the same time, not an isolated thing stripped of its culture, history and values. If ecology teaches us anything it may be that when we close our systems off without any possibility of feedback they and we die. When we let things form their own connections in language they and we thrive. The vitality of our cultures depends on this freedom to move and room to think in.

Any theory that demands we see a text as isolated from the world in which we live and communicate with each other should be ignored. Up to this point we have discussed the need for another conceptualization of what, why and how we should study language, especially the language of communication as experienced in the novel. What we need to do now is describe the features of such an ecolinguistics or an ecocriticism which looks and listens beyond the exophoric environment or Nature. At the same time, we must remember that we are not trying to invoke linear and compartmentalized thought patterns as if we begin with such strictures we run the risk of remaining within the old dualistic paradigm. To break our ideas down into the smallest analysable units at the beginning is to try to think our way out of the labyrinth while we are building onto that labyrinth.

Some key issues to be considered in an ecology of communication. The following list of points is not ordered in terms of a linear argument or a scale of importance. Instead, it is meant to suggest that there is no one correct way to approach the issues being raised and that we need to think of the issues from a number of different perspectives—kaleidoscopically, fractally, polyphonically. This is one way of collecting "thick" data.

1. While ecolinguistics so far has been seen as a branch of sociolinguistics, it cannot remain isolated within that field as sociolinguistics is presently constituted. Until we have rethought the ideas of structuralism and disentangled those ideas from the goals of sociolinguistics we may continue to think in terms of the linear and binary limitations of structuralism.
2. We need to re-ask the question "What is language?" in relation to the question "What is life?" We want to look at the life of words and we need a new conceptualization of what life is if we are to avoid the trap of thinking of life as a collection of molecules or language as a collection of phonemes or graphemes that our old science has taught us to

think of analytically. Words live and breathe in our voices and in the texts where we sound those voices.

3. Is there a DNA of language and, if so, is that DNA only in the brain or the mind or is it also on many different levels in all that we do? Is a phylogenetic explanation desirable at this point let alone possible? Just as the double helix may have described biological DNA but has not told us anything about what life is or means, so the DNA of language seen abstractly may fail to provide answers to the kind of questions we want to ask of language.
4. While we may have described the molecular structure of words, such an analysis tells us nothing about how these structures have combined historically or psychologically to form more complex structures. Our arguments are ahistorical. This is one of the problems with Chomsky's theory.
5. If these random molecules or phonemes etc. combine, they do so in a social and cultural context that must be explicable in historical terms. At the same time, we should be willing to countenance the idea that such organizations are self-generating and self-regulating open systems that may best be described at this stage in our thinking through the ideas of Chaos or Complexity Theory. Here we need to reconsider the practices of discourse analysis and stress less the analytical aspects and more the open horizons of discourse as discourse has been developed over the centuries in the humanities.
6. How are the mind and brain connected in terms of language? Here we need to re-read Vygotsky's work in the context of Bateson's ideas of the ecology of the mind. In doing this, we should try to foreground the ways these writers saw art and science as related through their emphasis of the social context in shaping the language of the mind. In other words, we need to recognize the fundamental role played by creativity in the ways these writers thought and expressed their ideas.
7. A new question needs to be asked: What is consciousness when we talk of language and culture and how is this consciousness historically shaped? This idea of consciousness may be usefully discussed in terms of Wertsch's (1991) "voices of the mind" we communicate in with ourselves and others as writers, narrators, characters, readers and critics of novels.
8. If words in an ecosystem of discourse are seen as living organisms, then what are the ways these organisms work together to form or shape our consciousness in society and in our cultures? Pointing out the formal connections in traditional grammars has not in itself managed to do this. Here, the field of literary criticism in conjunction with Halliday's (1978) systemic functional grammar may have insights to offer as well as ways of

organizing information we find as we look more closely into this matter. Words are the shapers of consciousness and the medium of communication which embody our thoughts.

9. Linear thinking may not be the best way to approach the definition of communication channels at the level of the smallest analysable parts of language. We need to see and hear the ways these parts form larger wholes that have their own environments that depend on each other and shape each other without necessarily doing so in linear causal ways. We should not reach for a cause and effect structure as our starting point.
10. We should not look for an over-arching unified theory of all things. Our fallibility ensures that we don't know enough about the ecology of language to do this and until we are free from dualistic models for theory we will continue to fall back into the trap of Cartesian thinking on such matters. To start with such a unified theory is to risk turning that theory into an old technology that overlooks the more chaotic aspects of what we are trying to see, hear, feel, taste and touch as experience.
11. Insofar as we talk of living, dying and dead languages we already have a linguistic source for our view that language is in some ways a living organism. For this reason historical linguistics and the study of "old" texts should be included in an ecological approach to our subject.
12. It seems contradictory to assume that society is a living organism but that culture and language are not. One way in which we can regain contact with such a life-giving spirit in language is to go back and look at the ways magic, alchemy, kabala, Gnosticism, neo-Platonism and other forms of mythic thinking have worked in the past and somehow are still powerful in society and culture today. Ideas do not die, but they may be forgotten for a while only to be resurrected later when the intellectual environment is more favourable to their reception. Such ideas seem to survive in underground streams of thought that demonstrate the futility of arguing that ideas or words are obsolete or superseded or supplanted by out latest new theories.
13. There is now a crisis in language studies that is related to the crises in our societies and cultures. Insofar as we can point to a poverty of language in our media and in our educational institutions we know that the need for an ecology of language that addresses this poverty is related to the ways we should address the issues of how other ways our life are debased and in danger. How we address these issues in the linguistic ecosystem will influence our responses in other ecosystems such as business, politics, literature, ethics, etc. These other systems will also influence the ways we develop our understanding of the ecology of language. If we want to take ethical actions based on our new ecology of

language then we need to include these other systems in our ecology from the beginning. To try to apply a linguistic idea that has been developed in isolation from these other systems is to invite recourse to the old technological approach and will fail insofar as such an ecology will be by definition abstract and will face the problem of convincing others that the solutions being proposed are pragmatic and achievable in those other fields. We cannot change perceptions by cloaking our new perceptions in terms of the old perceptions that stand in our way. Here, the question of the educational institution's ecology needs to be addressed. The mental health of our universities is related to the mental health of our discipline. The current plethora of Quality Assurance schemes that still operate within basically Cartesian parameters will impede the development of an ecology of education.

14. To see language holistically we cannot stop at the borders of language as these borders do not exist when we see ecology in the "deep" sense of the relations between ecosystems. We cannot abstract the human factor in language from the whole environment of language nor can we abstract language from the human aspects. Here, Hegel's (1807) idea of Mind as something larger than the individual human's mind may be useful. As we develop our sense of belonging to the cosmos, as in it and seeing that it is in us, we are moving towards thinking on a spiritual level that brings us close again to the power of myth in language and society. Language belongs in us and we belong in language. This is one of the main tenets of Heidegger's (n.d.) view of the world: we dwell in the house of language and we are its guardians, as he argues in his essay "The Way to Language".
15. Extending the anthropological linguistics work of Boas and Whorf, E.T. Hall (1966) drew attention to the roles body language and proxemics play in our communication. His research led him to see "communication as culture" (1966, 1) and that "we must begin seeing man as an interlocutor with his environment" (1966, 6). The ways we communicate in and with our literary or physical environment are the embodiments of our cultures in the material world. In this view, our use of language to communicate builds our ecosystems in society. The novels we read are cultural spaces that are shaped by our communications with them. This view led Hall to "use literary texts as data rather than simply as descriptions" (1966, 94). He found that "great writers perceive and communicate the meaning and uses of distance as a significant cultural factor in interpersonal relations" (1966, 94). In his description of Kafka's rendition of space, he stresses the impact of the great writer's words on the reader's body expressed as a sense of culturally shaped space: "His oppressive kinaesthetic spaces release in the reader hidden feelings engendered by past architectural harassments, reminding him again that his body is more than a shell, a

passive occupant of x number of cubic feet" (1966, 99). In Hall's terms, literature is a sensory experience created through the acts of communication.

16. In developing a view of the novel as an ecosystem in the language of which we live as readers and critics, we will need to study the language in different ways that ground our search in the physical world of communication. We need to sensually experience the language as ethnographers experience the societies they study. Our data for this study will be "thick" in terms of it coming from many sources and in many different ways. When we do this, we are actually doing what any novelist does: novels are ethnographic creations of social realities that exist in the narrations of the novels.
17. We need to go into the deep linguistically shaped political structures of language and see the historical and psychological forces that shape the language. Here, the work of Raymond Williams (1973) and E.P. Thompson (1963) may be relevant. For these writers, literature always exists in the ecosystem that is the history of the work from its initial social conditions through to the ways we understand it now. As society changes, so does the way we write and read novels. All great novelists are sensitive to the ways we change our world and our language through the acts of communication.
18. We need discourses that can accommodate the dynamic flows that are always present in the ecosystem of the novels we communicate with in order to study. Such discourses need to be ethnographic narratives of the ways we communicate with what we are studying as we study it. In writing these narratives, we are telling the story of how we learned to communicate with the texts in order to find out the questions and theories embodied in the text, not imposed from distant unhistorical theories we bring to our study as *a priori* versions of the truth. This is another way of saying that we need to approach the novel as ethnomethodologists who see through the senses of the writers and characters how they make sense of their world as that world is realized in the novels where they live. If, by communicating with the novelist, the narrator and the characters, we can evince our sympathy and empathy with them as communicators, then we may say that we have successfully communicated as readers and critics. In this way, we learn more about ourselves as human beings who communicate in the social contexts of the novels we read.
19. Any student of literature, history or any other form of knowledge needs to keep an open mind about who they are communicating with in the discourses they study. Isaiah Berlin makes this point when he says: "Members of one culture can, by the force of imaginative insight, understand (what Vico called *entrare*) the values, the ideals, the forms of life of another culture or society, even those remote in time and space. They may find these

values unacceptable, but if they open their minds sufficiently they can grasp how one might be a full human being, with whom one could communicate, and at the same time live in the light of values widely different from one's own, but which nevertheless one can see to be values, ends of life, by the realization of which men could be fulfilled" (Berlin, 1997, 9). Here, the issue is one of communication made possible by the use of our imagination in an open way that doesn't seek to prejudge what we find or impose our own preconceived ideas on it. If we keep to our own theories we have no opportunity to communicate with those we study; we are not studying to prove that we are right, but to affirm our humanity by recognizing the humanity of those we communicate with in order to study their societies and cultures.

20. If we are to think and communicate through the networks imbedded in our ecology, we need to have a better understanding of the idea of influence. While we may influence others without dominating them, we also need to understand the ways our language and thoughts are influenced. These influences cannot be isolated as they are part of the feedback system itself which we see as language. This means that we need a deeper cultural understanding of the ways language develops these networks and feedback loops in an ecosystemic way. Up until now, the study of these loops has been shaped by the old technology and remains locked in the still mechanized field of cybernetics. We will have to re-define cybernetics if we are to utilize ideas that we draw from there. This is part of what I have referred to as our need to criticize all of the things that we think and do in language. We have yet to countenance the possibility that river systems may be a better model for these networks than the telephone is in Shannon's theory.
21. We need to look at the system of interdependencies that binds language together as an ecological whole. While Halliday's social semiotics has done much to deepen our understanding of this interdependency in the social context, it remains to be seen how the model of semiotics that sees things in terms of signifiers and signifieds can escape the duality trap. While it appears that a semiotic system already thinks in an ecological way, this has not been brought out consciously yet and the ramifications for this deeper ecological view have yet to be applied to the ways we practice communication. Here, ethnographic research based on broad, deep and thick evidence will be invaluable. At present, the human values of semiotics remain obscured under the weight of ideas that see signs as empty of intent, as neutral or mechanical things, which they are not. The failure of semiotics in literary studies to enunciate a humanistic value system is a sign in itself that a lot of work remains to be done in relating semiotics to the issues raised in the humanities'

communicative approaches to culture and art as well as to language. While semioticians remain focused on texts as material to be worked on by their methods, they cannot see how these texts exist in symbiotic relations with their methods. This has led to a dominant trend among the semioticians and their students to fetishize the technique at the expense of seeing semiotics as part of a larger whole. Insofar as we can link this poststructuralist way of thinking to the rise of hyperreality (Conlon, 2009), we must insist that semiotics be responsible for its contributions to the hazards of intellectual life in the crumbling edifice of the university. The failure to produce criticism or actions that actually connect in tangible ways to the social and cultural challenges that face the intellectual has limited the possibilities of semiotics contributing to life outside its presently defined narrow perimeters. When we recognize that there are values and an ethics inherent in all things in the world, we cannot refuse to judge or change that world or learn from it how being a good academic means being an ethical person whose knowledge is related to everything else in the ecosystem. We and nature, society and culture are indivisibly whole. While this may sound abstract and even religious, this holistic vision of humanity in the world has been a feature of human thought that myths have tried to express for millennia. While semiotics remains tightly linked to Saussure's Langue, it will remain mechanistic and so not flexible to address wider ethical issues of language and culture as created through the acts of real human communications in real social contexts.

22. The social context is the source of our relationships and our actions in our ecosystems. How these relationships and actions are conceived and have effect depends on how we communicate them.
23. When we are studying literature as language, in terms of society and culture, we must always remember that the point of our thoughts and actions is to contribute to the life of our world. A healthy relationship with the subjects we study requires us to find ways of putting ourselves into the systems we study and live in, not ways to abstract us out of them. Here, the importance of the voices we use and the personality of the thinker must be emphasized, much as Erasmus, Rabelais, Montaigne and others did in the Renaissance. We cannot abstract or banish the author or the artist from the art any more than we can abstract ourselves from our criticism. To do so is to act in bad faith as even such a gesture is still a cultural act. Emotions, intentions, biography are all important elements in the ecology of any work of art.
24. No one science or art can be placed in precedence or ranked in importance over any of the other arts or sciences as such a solitary source seems inevitably to lead to binary thinking

in which each of the other areas is measured against the dominant one. Such thinking maintains the top-down power structures that limit the world by closing it off to other sources of ideas. We cannot divide things in such hierarchies without choosing between art and science etc. Such choices are signs that we remain within the old paradigm that seeks authority in logic and in argument that asserts the need to have an ultimate test of truth. This argument seems to always lead us back to the idea that the truth is out there waiting to be discovered once and for all in a manifest way. Instead, we can bring to our research the values Popper advocates as verisimilitude which he traces back to Xenophanes whom he recognizes as "a poet and perhaps the first literary critic" (Popper, 1963, 539). If we remain in the mind-set of proving that our theories are "true" we may never grasp the meaning of life in an ecological world view; instead of putting our ideas together, we will remain competitive and divisive.

25. When we think of language we need to focus on issues such as multi-sensory awareness, the multiple intelligences that we all need to develop if we really are to communicate with each other in an ecosystemic way, and the ability to see our various discourses as related to each other comprehensively. While we are very good at dividing language, we have yet to develop ways of bringing it all together in ourselves and our studies.
26. At first, this new synthesis may appear chaotic and overly complex. But it isn't. We see it that way if we remain bound by the old models of knowledge and thinking that keep our language locked in the discourses of communities that have lost their ability to communicate with what they study as humans. Here, the surrealists, particularly Breton and Dali, have much to teach us. So do poets such as William Blake. Their discourses need to be studied closely, not as curiosities or aberrations but as ahead of their times. We should take them at least as seriously as we take any "reasonable" academic discourse and probably more than we take discourses that remain locked in uncommunicative abstractions called theories.

While these are some of the things that an ecology of language needs to consider, we should now spend more time on the ways things work in ecosystems so that we can develop our depth of perception and representation so as to study language in ways that are also ecologically sound.

Our study of the ecosystem is itself a part of the ecosystem and shapes it as we study it. It does this because we are communicating with what we study. Our communicative acts

are what keep the ecosystem healthy or alive. Such life is produced by the ways we feedback into the system we are in.

This relationship between ourselves as readers and writers leads to a commitment to study ethically; if we don't do this, we harm the ecosystem we are in. This often occurs in communicative events when one or more of the participants refuse to recognize those they are meant to be communicating with as equal partners in the communication process. Once we accept the need to communicate with the novels we read, we can be judged by the quality of our communication which keeps the language of the novels alive in our own world.

What is to be done? To study the novel in an ecofriendly way, we need to think of what methods we can draw from the novels we study. This is basically what ethnomethodology proposes.

If novels require us to understand them as communication and are often about how we communicate, then we need a communicative approach to those novels; not an imported genetically modified theory that comes from another, alien, system which more often than not destroys the ecosystem.

Insofar as the novel in English rises with *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), we have evidence that ethnology was there in the development of the genre. As we trace this view of people in different social contexts historically, we find that novels have often foregrounded this aspect of their world. This is also clear in Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, Melville's stories of the South Seas and whaling and London's sociological study of the East End in *People of the Abyss* (1903) and his focus on the sociologist Freddy Drummond as his hero in "South of the Slot" (1909) who writes ethnographies of the working class in San Francisco. It seems fitting that we critics use the same ways of thinking and writing found in the materials we study: if we are to understand the ways novels communicate, we need to describe those novels in ways that focus on the language as communicative in intent and from a number of different perspectives. This way to the novel is perhaps best followed when we use ethnographic materials in our research. Such an approach requires us to recognize that novels are often describing the ways people talk to each other and the situations they are in when they talk; they give us voluminous "thick data" in a narrative which stands or falls critically on our response to it as verisimilar to our own experiences or feelings as communicators. Once we can enter the situations emicly, from the inside, we are in a position from which we can interpret what we read based on what we find there, not on what we try to impose on the material we experience.

This way of understanding what is happening in novels seems impossible from a poststructuralist perspective, as Lodge (1966, 299) points out when he responds to charges that "expressive realism" is "untenable" and "literally unthinkable": They [literary texts] are intentional acts and their manifest intention is to communicate (even if what is communicated, as in many modern texts, is the difficulty or impossibility of communication). The gaps, contradictions, aporias which deconstructive critics delight to trace in the texts that come under their scrutiny, are only interesting, only perceptible, because they occur in and in spite of the manifest communicative project of the author, to identify which (from the text) must be the initial move of all reading (299–300).

When we approach a novel with our own communicative intentions, we need to have a firm idea about what we are doing as we read ethnographically. The more clear our understanding of an author's "communicative project", the more we can see or experience the novel from the inside, as a participant-observer in its communication process. This quality of experience relates to the ecology of the novel's environment and explains how we learn about ourselves and the language we use from reading novels.

These ideas are not new; they are implicit in the history of the novel. Any student with a breadth and depth of experience in reading novels should recognize that novels have from the beginning practiced what ethnographers in sociolinguistics and anthropology have been doing for the past hundred years too. Instead of being wary of imposing alien frames on our study, we should understand that we are bringing out was has become obscured by more recent criticism that seeks to block communication rather than foster it. In this way, we draw our approach from the novels themselves, not from Theory. In doing this, we are experiencing them in a verisimilar way to that envisaged by John Dewey which is where we started our journey into the environs of the novel—every reader, like an ethnographer, begins a journey into a novel's environment once he or she begins to read it. If the novel we chose to engage with is communicatively intended, we can use our real world knowledge drawn from our social experiences to understand and to help others understand what we are talking about. We can also draw on our real world experience as communicators with other human beings to understand what is happening in a novel: communication. To describe and understand these experiences should be of paramount importance to a humanistic critic who wants to make novels relevant in the real world.

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Ideology and Inscription: "Cultural Studies" after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin

Tom Cohen, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

To search for where you already are is the most benighted of quests, and the most fated.
(Bloom: 1973 / 1997: 13)

The title of Tom Cohen's book, published eighteen years ago and so to many trendy culture theory people seemingly lost in the past as part of an archive rumoured to exist but rarely accessed, turns upside down our sense of time: Culture Studies surely come after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin. After all, these writers are meant to be the foundation texts of this field of studies. Or are they only so in our lip service? How many students of Culture Studies have actually grappled with these texts . . . interpreting them afresh? Or have too many just accepted the common wisdom passed along in the literature concerning these writers? What if the field we are meant to be expert in is based on misreading of texts? If we are such poor or lazy readers, then what kind of academics are we? The Bloomian defence that we are always misreading texts as part of the creative process can't be accepted if we have never even heard of let alone read Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. (This apparently tangential reference is not as out-of-place as it may seem; Bloom was one of the committee members on Cohen's doctoral dissertation, along with J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman and Paul de Man. Relax. This review is not following that trace or track.) These are questions that have been haunting me for quite a while. But other questions have also been materializing: How can we address the crises in our present catastrophic condition as we watch the edifice of the University as an idea crumble like Poe's House of Usher around us? Are we wilfully complicit in our own decimation? If so, what can be done to change things? It was questions like these that had been leading me to consider the prospects of entering the field of "culture studies" by writing explicitly on the texts that seem to mesmerize those who label themselves as "Culture Studies people". But the gauche "fanzine" voices I too often encountered in my forays into the area always put me off; academics trying to sound like tabloid journalists, pretending to be creative and to see through the eyes of the consumer that they seem to idolize as the only valid reader or viewer. Such criticism, it seems to me, celebrates the very things it was meant to critique: the more one pretends to study a thing, the more one gives it a sense of an aura of authority . . . as a valid weighty object to be studied . . . worthy of analysis . . . the more one reinforces its power as a cultural "icon" and so ensures its survival in the

archive of the present. Had we lost our paths and sold out to the objects we were meant to deconstruct and expose as ideological constructs that perpetuate the oppressive forces of mass culture? Had the consumer been consumed as just another product; only this time, the researchers have been consumed by the market forces they "originally" set out to expose as false gods? Wasn't Barthes now just another of his own *Mythologies*? Did we ever have a clear understanding of the things we said we were studying and teaching; or were these things playing us, using our voices to spread their own messages (suitably encrypted) that we should accept our lots as consumers, forget our critical languages, and join the party of celebrating the cults of mediocrity and amateurism? These were my questions when I started to read Tom Cohen's *Ideology and Inscription*. I was also curious as to how he read films. And so, I started reading the first volume of his *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies* (2005) at the same time. After about thirty pages of his Hitchcock studies, I realized that much of the thinking shaping that work was "prefigured" in his earlier *Ideology and Inscription*. At that point, I decided to concentrate on the earlier book that seemed in its subtitle to hint at a way of reading his work that required an understanding of what had been written before . . . a critical reading that would allow me to identify where in the Hitchcock books he was coming from and perhaps where he was going. This is not to suggest that the move is from "theory" to "practice" in some vulgar one-way move. In fact, Hitchcock figures or looms large in the earlier work. But, the two books seem to work in tandem, much as many of Walter Benjamin's essays do: say, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and the "Theses on the Philosophy of History". Our thinking is never in one place at one time; to try to think in such a narrow way is to take up residence in the graveyard of ideas. These other texts may be "secret agents", other inscriptions that are intended to attack all that we may hold as holy in our comfortable world of safe, anodyne ideas. The hint is given early in the preface to his *Hitchcock*:

> One finds oneself drawn into a prehistory of the afterlife of the present, a zone of unfinished epistemo-political wars, still-contested histories, teletechnic events not yet grasped. (Cohen, 2005, xii)

The jumbling sense of time (almost a Rabelaisian *trouvaille*) breaks the monochronic sense of time as a linear thing that leads us to where we are today: we are not finished with the past; it has not passed away except in our own idealized fiction that we are actually fulfilling the

promises of a past we have largely invented (by misinterpreting it). Cohen later spells out one of the ramifications of his own reading of Hitchcock:

> The rewriting or rewiring of "Hitchcock"—at the core of the cinematic canon—involves similar repercussions, since it potentially alters and sends tremors through entire critical and cultural histories and their innumerable extensions. (Cohen, 2005, xiv)

Again, a reverberation from his prefigural work on inscriptions and "altered states" (Cohen, 1998, 221–237). He seems to be inviting us to read works from different times together to break the monochronic or linear spell of teleology. In inviting such a way of reading as a new (old and forgotten) way of "seeing" what we have learned not to recognize, Cohen is perhaps activating time-bombs that have lain in the archive waiting to be detonated. Once these secret agents have been exploded along with the idols we have lamely invented to deny their existence, the groundwork of what we now may comfortably think of as a settled area we call "Culture Studies" will start to shift beneath our feet. There is an earthquake coming in Film Studies that may topple the auteur idol along with all the lame language we have built our faux Babel on in recent years. And the name of the fault line along which this is coming is perhaps encrypted in Cohen's *Hitchcock*. But the subterranean chambers are elsewhere . . . in his *Inscription* and in his readings of those who have, perhaps against their own intentions, served as the foundation ground of "Culture Studies". Hence, the worry quotes as a hint that the name is actually a misnomer or a thing of the future past. Or, to reference an article Cohen published in the *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society*, 7. 2 (October 2013), there is a prefiguring of his suggestion that "Culture Studies" (Cohen, 2013, 2) may already be dead . . . a zombie. To start again: Culture Studies in worry quotes may be a mechanical palace of many rooms built over the tarn of misreading; an ideology in need of demolition through inscriptive strategies learned by "going back" to its foundation texts and learning how to read them in more radical ways than the lame ones that have become clichéd or hack regurgitations of old dogmas foisted on us by the new idols of academe who seem to encourage us to see and accept our commodification as a natural and desirable outcome of our own poor readings that seek to speak the language of our enemies, and so become our enemies . . . and hence, complicit in our own destruction. We have been absorbed into the culture machine which we have perhaps always desired to be since our inception as an area of academic life. Impatient (illiterate) readers don't like theorizing for themselves; they prefer to

repeat the theories of others as authorities that sanction their habitual sloth. The idea of returning to the sources to re-examine what they actually said and interpret it for ourselves is time-consuming and difficult. But Culture Studies isn't meant to be difficult . . . it is meant to be Pop. We like to associate with people who think and talk like us. This reassures us that we are not alone. But a serious theorist can't think like this. Isolation and conflict are seemingly aspects of the thinking process. These are qualities a reader of Cohen's work will need to embrace if that reader is to survive the apparent ordeal of having to think critically when reading the texts. A reader who is comfortably numb with vague notions of what a particular writer means or says, will feel discomfort in Cohen's webs. Cohen doesn't offer sound-bites of thinking that merely echo the writers he is drawing and drawing from. He engages these writers to break them away from the clinging echoists who claim to speak in their voices. For him, old writers are new when read for the first time by any reader; they are also new when seen in a different way. At the core of Cohen's work is this attempt to help us find new ways of seeing what we at present only dimly or darkly see as shadows we carry around in our pre-programmed memories as ideological shibboleths. The Blakean doors of perception are open wide, if only we are willing to walk through them into another world of thought . . . a lost one where literary thinking still has a role to play in our newly visualized / delusional cults of parroting what others have already authoritatively pronounced. To put back together the literary and the filmic is a major achievement; to conceptualize the literary remains we may disinter as bodies that actually never died and to do this by re-reading them in conjunction with whatever else we are studying: These are skills that are mostly lacking in the writings on film and culture that I have previously read that seem to ventriloquize the words of others and masquerade these "new" words as major events in theory.

If the idea of theory has a bad name, it is probably as a result of this mediocre or lame pseudo-theorizing . . . a repetition of accepted wisdom. We dumb-down what we accept as thinking by redefining it as "thinking" exactly what others have already thought . . . as clone-speak. This is a nightmarish travesty of what Benjamin saw as a consequence of mechanical reproduction. No aura is possible except in the deluded minds of those who think they are doing theory when in fact they are being done by it in its ideological shape as the accepted wisdom of the ruling classes. The ideologies foisted on us want to foster this clone-thinking in our universities; they don't want actual theories being developed outside of the confines of the safe ideas so far inculcated in us by the culture industry we have made our friend instead of foe when we willingly serve to repackage it and rebrand it as eternally new and exciting kitsch to be consumed by our students in easily digestible bites of useless information that we

expect them to subscribe to in their own "thinking" and repeat in a catatonic self-referentiality that just repeats what others think. In this, we are digging our own graves again and again. Deaf, dumb and blind parrots have no idea of engaging with the sensorium they may be offered a way into. This is the danger of offering these people new ideas. But if we can cure our amnesia and remember in new ways, we may reembody what has been buried in a past that seems dead and forgotten. And we can do this by re-inhabiting the dead texts in uninhibited way, possessing them and perhaps letting them possess us. Unread texts are dead until someone comes along, tears apart the shrouds of conventionally sanctioned reading, and shows us that the ideas we thought were passed away have come back to haunt us . . . even as a bad conscience. This is Tom Cohen's major achievement. The ancient Greeks had the Apophrodes, a festive day set aside for the return of the dead to re-inhabit the houses where they had once lived. This was not necessarily a "spooky" experience (to use a word that may come from the lexicon of cultural study kitsch). What Cohen may be holding out to us is the prospect of a return of the critical writing and reading skills we seem to have lost in the age of fallen or "low / lite" theory. Such a return of the past, of the spectres of Benjamin, de Man and Bakhtin in the materiality of their languages that have been debased by their apparent followers in cultural studies could be provoked by us returning to the houses of these writers too; we visit them and invite them to re-visit us as hauntings. For Cohen, these inhabitations occur in the materiality of language which is to be heard in the prefigural, the before ("the prehistory of the afterlife of the present" referred to above in this review). In his reading of Benjamin's Thesis XVII where Benjamin spells out his rejection of historicism in favour of what he terms a "materialistic historiography" (Benjamin, 1970, 254), Cohen is framing his thinking of what he will later term as telemorphosis or the switching of signals from the past to the present. He expresses this in relation to what Benjamin calls the "monad". Yet this monad can be converted, in a cross-historical switchboard or cultural mnemonics, to produce new possible configurations or futures. It is a term, as we noted, allied to an alteration in systems of reference as such. The time of this occasion like the non-present of the so-called Jetztzeit, a "state of emergency" or emergence, implies a momentary voiding of received contents—as if by the sheer assertion of formal or material elements (Cohen, 1998, 10–11). Such a state of emergency may be what we are in today regarding cultural studies and the academy. In Benjamin, Cohen senses a way forward by going back into the materiality that comes before the figural or mimetic urge that still characterizes literary, linguistic and culture studies drives. Such a materiality, drawing on the always exterior domain of prefigural inscription, does not achieve some new meaning or determination by virtue of a messianic

revelation (such could, at best, only repeat a past historicist narrative). It passes, or seems to pass, through an aesthetic formalization of this materiality itself, optioning in a virtual mode that caesura-effect associated in "The Task of the Translator", with something called "pure language", *reine Sprache* . . . in this conceptual remapping, notoriously present in The Birth of Tragedy (but also from before the "dawn" of the West, as is apparent in counter-canonical readings of texts going back to and preceding Plato), the aesthetic appears rewritten as one "materialistic" conduit and cipher for a more general, pre- and posthistorial graphematics out of which "experience" is shaped and produced (Cohen, 1998, 11). These passageways are given here in part to invite the reader of this review to a close reading of Cohen's language, to see and more importantly to hear (feel) its materiality as it evokes his sensorium of thought. To read him through the eyes of Benjamin:

> Materialistic historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history—blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. (Benjamin, 1970, 254)

These arrests in part are re-embodied in Cohen's dense language; a language that demands the reader stop and think, struggle with the text, perform a close reading of it. To arrest the flow, the constructed ideologies of literature that have led to the era of culture studies amongst other poltergeists, is the task of the reader as translator or as transmitter of a struggle to free the past from the burdens of wilful misinterpretations placed on it that disregard any spirit of the text being considered. The language itself provides this "shock", like a galvanizing jolt that brings the text and its prefigural language to life—prefigural in the sense that the figura, at least as formed by Auerbach to frame his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953) where biblical structures of narrative are seen to shape the Western canon with the Old Testament being realized in the figures of the New Testament. Cohen doesn't stop here: he rejects the New Historicist approaches that try to read

the past in terms of present theories, thus colonizing the past with politically correct ideologies that are consumable products for the present reader who wants to see the present as the figural realization of the past so as to avoid the boring need to actually read texts from the past. This is where Cohen's ideas started to spark a jolt in me, as I was thinking that most ideologies of literature only seek to impose their own political beliefs on a narrow band of texts that are reader-friendly. Here, I am thinking particularly of Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978) which advocates filling the target text's apparently absent centre with the ideology a critic feels has been hidden or concealed. In this particular post-structuralist form, the literary text merely becomes the figura of the ideology espoused by the critic. Such simplistic and heavy-handed "readings" have justified too much low theory in recent decades where the actual language of the text is almost totally ignored, even denied to exist, so that the critic can speak for the artist without bothering to offer an analysis of the language that is said to be ideological rather than literary or aesthetic in any sense. For Cohen, there is more of a "trialogue" (Cohen, 1998, 86) than a dialogue, with the text itself being a part of the process. While he doesn't go so far as to accuse Bakhtin of reneging on or avoiding close readings of texts, I do see this silence in Bakhtin as a lacuna or silence that makes his ideas vulnerable to charges of being non-specific.

To return to the review: Cohen is admirably able to resurrect or jolt Benjamin's text back to life insofar as his reading of it startles us with its originality and force. We see Benjamin in a new way, and he in turn is able to speak or read us. The revolutionary possibility countenanced by Cohen is that once the past starts reading us, instead of the one-way-street of us reading the past badly, we blast our own era out of the homogenous course of history that seems to have been pre-destined for us by our masters and their minions in the thoroughly reactionary world of academe that has replaced the ideals of the University with the side-show attractions of an academic theme park (Conlon, 2009, 266–294). Without the encouraging support of voices such as Cohen's, I would not even think of venturing into the abysm of time, backwards or not, that is "culture studies" as it is presently institutionalized as a series of media events. Instead, I would rather echo Melville's Bartleby, the scrivener or copyist who rejects the dull cloddish life of the clerk—unlike too many in the academy now who seem to thrive on the drone-like existence of mouthing other people's platitudes in a nightmarish twist to Benjamin's angst-ridden heralding of the age of mechanical reproduction as a possible new dawn in bringing art to the proletarians. History may once again be repeating itself, finally in Marx's vision as farce, with the new direction being the reproduction of automata through the deadpan duplication of what passes for acceptable

academic prose devoid of any art or life. The perhaps intended heirs to Benjamin's prophetic vision have failed him and as a consequence are being mechanically reproduced *en masse* in our universities. If this is the case, then I take my cue from Bartleby by saying "I would prefer not" to grind out commercially focused copies or clones of mimetic representations of the market's vision for all academics and writers. Reading Tom Cohen's work gives me hope that there may be another way in or out of the trap . . . another way of continuing to write, along with Beckett, by finally finding the strength to write:

> . . . perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. (Beckett, 1965, 414)

I hope that others will open the door proffered by Cohen. There is a world enough, but will there be time? That I don't know as I am no John of Patmos.

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Proxemics and the Novel: An Ecological Approach

Abstract

The term “proxemics” was coined by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall to describe the relationships between people in terms of the distances and spaces they set up in their societies which shape the ways they behave towards each other. For Hall, these spaces are the “hidden languages” of a culture which contribute to the meanings of other communication acts individuals in that culture perform. As Hall argues, each culture shapes and interprets these spaces in different ways.

While Hall looks at the role of these spaces in art, he does not develop his ideas beyond a description of how certain artists such as Rembrandt and Kafka exploit social spaces in their work for artistic effects. The implication is that artists are sensitive to such spaces as they are skilled communicators whose role is to connect with their audience through the various linguistic and visual media. Artists embody their world through their perceptions and representations of what they see as the reality of their art. Inherent in all the forms of literary art (drama, poetry, novels, journals and films) there is a social fact that may well be true of all language but which is highlighted in the literary form: private life is looked at in a public way. Literary art seems to offer ways of exploiting or perceiving and representing this tension between inner and outer life which is at the heart of the matter being discussed here.

With the explosion of English outside the inner circle countries subsequent to the publication of Hall’s research, the issues raised by Hall need to be re-examined and expanded in terms of the opportunities and threats such changes create for an English teacher working in a classroom where the students lack any lived sense of the experience of these spaces in English, the language they are learning. As they learn the language, they are also learning to come to terms with the ways the English language has shaped space in terms of the L1 cultures and how the new societies learning to use English for communication are reshaping their own relationships in possibly new ways now.

This paper considers the implications of these ideas for the novel in terms of how a proxemics framework may help us reconsider the ways we read and write about novels, especially in the Asian context of teaching English as a foreign language in Thailand. How is social life embodied in Asian and Western novels through the ways sociocultural spaces dialectically shape and are shaped by the language of the novel? What does a proxemic

approach to the novel contribute to our understanding of the ecology of language in Asian and Western novels, especially in terms of how these novels may be taught to and read by the growing large readership in Asia?

In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1937–1938 / 1973) M.M. Bakhtin uses the term chronotope (time space) to describe "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). By looking at the various formations of plot and genre in the European or Western novel as it develops up to the writings of Rabelais, Bakhtin follows the historical development of the "process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature" (84). As the historical sociocultural spaces changed, so did the ways the novel absorbed these changes into its art. Basic to his thesis is a materialist vision of art and history.

While Bakhtin's work is a foundation of this study, we need to redress the imbalance in his approach, influenced as it is by Einstein's then new theories in physics in which time was the fourth dimension (84), which saw time as the dominant force in the novel. By balancing the sense of space with time in the light of Hall's work on time and space, we may highlight the possibilities offered by shifting focus away from the view of language as basically temporal, to a view that language is also a shape that influences our experience of time. Time may well be a significant force; but as Hall shows in *The Dance of Life*, time too is to be understood in terms of its various cultural meanings and not taken at face value as meaning what it does monochronically or linearly only in the West.

Another historical limitation is that while Bakhtin and Hall both realize the role of space in language use, they do not stress the role of language as shaping our sense of space. Nor do they look at the lexico-grammatical features of space. Using the ideas of M.A.K. Halliday's Functional Grammar which stresses that grammar is a theory of experience, we now are in a better position to describe these shapes inside the language used to write and read novels. When we use language to create and manipulate the spaces between us as we communicate, we are expressing aspects of our deep rooted cultural assumptions about these spaces. As Benjamin Lee Whorf argued before Bakhtin and Hall, the language used by members of a cultural group reflects those people's beliefs about the ways reality is organized and interpreted; we see the world through the prism or kaleidoscope of our language. Critics such as Raymond Williams and Edward W. Said have argued that the materialist foundations of language and art have shaped the ways writers in the West have ideologically appropriated ethnic, class and other spaces to turn them into versions of reality consistent with the dominant or hegemonic views of Western cultures.

The approach to a novel's language advocated in this paper may be set out in a number of propositions:

1. We create space pragmatically through our language as part of the way we communicate through our schemata and frames of reference when we use the language.
2. We use language as a resource to make meanings in a social context.
3. The novel, as one way we make meanings, may be viewed as a little world that embodies these contexts as the writer's conscious or unconscious theory of the world.
4. John Searle's theory of how "brute" reality is transformed into "institutional facts" through the community's use of language may explain the ways our reality is absorbed into our language in terms that are consistent with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.
5. Developing Austin's and Searle's ideas, John Gumperz suggests that through our social discourses, both written and spoken, our social identities are shaped into speech acts.
6. Lev Vygotsky's idea of zones of proximal development seems to accommodate the view that communication in the learning process, especially as that process is linguistically defined in terms of the ways language is used as a scaffold for the learner (or reader), evokes the image of a progressively narrowing space between the communicants which reflects the social and cultural forces at work in the teaching-learning process. This also seems to be applicable to the ways we learn to read a novel in the act of reading as much as from critics and teachers.
7. Lakoff and Johnson argue that language enables us to embody our mind in our language as we use that language to think and to communicate, often as metaphors of space in our language. This externalization of our minds may be related to Hegel's phenomenology and to Vygotsky's ideas about how we conceptualize and communicate with our inner voices.
8. The creation and maintenance of social spaces influences the cohesion of the novelist's discourse in his text.
9. When the proxemic characteristics of language are viewed in terms of an organic system (language, the novel, art, etc.) and when that system is understood in terms of the characteristics of Chaos Theory, then space is understood as an active and dynamic force and thing.
10. The qualities of a Chaos System that may be applicable to the study of the novel's linguistic proxemics are dissipation, non-linearity, openness, self-organization, a-periodicity, a sensitive dependence on initial conditions, the role of feedback as a shaper of space, the turbulence of language as a space, and the fractal patterns of language

organized around strange attractors such as the writer's or reader's own hidden cultural assumptions about the ways the linguistic world works.

One characteristic of the various linguistic approaches mentioned above is that we look at the place of our mind in nature. Searle asks the question about how our mental world fits into the physical world (xi). However, we should also stand this question on its head and ask how the physical world, biological as much as cultural material which comprises the physical world, fits into our linguistic space when we perceive and represent that physical world in a novel. This approach looks at the relationship between material reality and linguistic reality as dialectical, not as a one-way base-superstructure mechanism. Put another way, while our sociocultural experience shapes the novel, the novel also shapes our experience of the sociocultural world. We need to understand better how our actual life and world come into our language as space when we use that language to communicate in the actual world. When we use language, we change it and the spaces it embodies and is embodied by in our own lives. The role of creative language, as it is found in the novel, is a major contributing factor to the various linguistic ways we relate to our environments.

This relationship between language and the environment is more than an issue for "green" criticism or even for Critical Discourse Analysis as these practices are currently understood. This paper offers a view of language itself as an ecosystem which is organized in ways that do not neatly fit the current paradigms of structural or post-structural linguistics. Until we expand our understanding of language itself as a material force, we will not be able to develop the study of the dialectic of language as a social fact in art.

After discussing some examples of how space is created and exploited in fiction, and how this sense of space is a culturally shaped material force that has sociolinguistic significance in the reading and interpretation of fictions, it will be suggested that the teacher of reading, and of creative reading in particular, especially where the text's language is "foreign" or culturally distant to the reader in space and / or in time, may need to consider the explicit teaching of the implications of the ten propositions enumerated above in teacher education and in the learning classroom.

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Before looking at the ways space is perceived and represented in the Asian novel in English, we need to have a sense of how space can be used consciously by an artist working within the Western paradigms of space. The work of Henry James is used in this connection

because James' exploitation of a sense of space in many ways pushes to the limits the power of language to evoke a sense of space for full grammatical, semantic and phonological effect. The novel chosen in this regard is *The Sacred Fount* (1901) which itself has a spatial significance as it indicates a transition from the middle James to the later James style. That James chose not to include *The Sacred Fount* in his New York Edition of his works is yet another area where the issue of proxemics (understood as a distancing or exclusion of material) may be pertinent in reading the novel. However, such issues only become of interest after the fact. Before we look at the subsequent history of a particular novel we need to look more closely at the language in it. What follows is a close reading of the opening two paragraphs of *The Sacred Fount*; the beginning of a novel is itself a significant space. Hopefully, the various readings offered in this paper will demonstrate the importance of a close reading for any ecological criticism of language which concerns itself with the importance of understanding the ways proxemically understood space in the novel may be fruitfully studied in a non-trivial way which actually looks at the words in the text as the data to be studied and interpreted. There is a great need for more teaching of such close reading skills in Asia, particularly in the EFL classroom.

The Sacred Fount begins, as most major novels do, by disrupting or jogging the reader's habitual expectations and perspectives. This is a way of the novelist shaping our vision or acclimatizing us to his or her world which, hopefully, will offer us something beyond or at least not identical with our own world. We are taught how to see the novel's world and language as we are absorbed slowly into that environment as we struggle to accommodate ourselves to the unfamiliar shapes and sounds of the artist's words. The first paragraph of the novel reads:

> It was an occasion, I felt—the prospect of a large party—to look out at the station for others, possible friends and even possible enemies, who might be going. Such premonitions, it was true, bred fears when they failed to breed hopes, though it was to be added that there were sometimes, in the case, rather happy ambiguities. One was glowered at, in the compartment, by people who on the morrow, after breakfast, were to prove charming; one was spoken to first by people whose sociability was subsequently to show as bleak, and one built on confidence on others who were never to reappear at all—who were only going to Birmingham. As soon as I saw Gilbert Long, some way up the platform, however, I knew him as an element. It was not so much that the wish was father to the thought as that I remembered having already

> more than once met him at Newmarch. He was a friend of the house—he wouldn't be going to Birmingham. I so little expected him, at the same time, to recognize me that I stopped short of the carriage near which he stood—I looked for a seat that wouldn't make us neighbours. (3)

As an aside, this involution is a characteristic of the novel's narrator as well as his narrative language. The two effects reinforce each other through a parallel or similar effect. The space is closing in around the narrator and so around the reader. We are being absorbed into a very confined world space which seems to be open and expansive through all the modalities of James' prose. One reading of the novel that becomes apparent as one enters it later is that the narrator may be writing it as he experiences the things he discusses in it. This makes the environment of the novel even more self-consciously manipulated as we start to think about whether the whole game or scenario is created by the narrator in order to write about it as it occurs. This reading is not pre-empted by the novel's ending which is open. It does not return to the point we could expect where the narrator says that he chose to write about the experience once he learned from the experience he had at Newmarch. The novel's space remains problematically a labyrinth. When read in relation to other novels written between the turn of the century and the First World War, this sense of labyrinthine space takes on social and cultural meanings that extend beyond James' particular effect in this novel. One thinks of Mann's *Death in Venice*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Gide's *The Immoralist*, London's *The Sea Wolf* and Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as other examples of this involution of the narrative and the story as the two spaces create ambiguities in which the reader tries to unravel the space.

The new sense of space in these novels may be characterized as a folding in of space on itse1f. As such, this space is centripetal and claustrophobic. In contrast, the dominant form of nineteenth-century Victorian fiction was centrifugal and expansive; the novel unfolds as it develops or is read. In the modernist text, the environment engulfs the characters, pushing them together to impact on each other. The movement is towards the internal space of the mind, a house, a dialogue. In such novels, all space is filled with significance. This compactness is also found in the language of the novels. The words are highlighted and pushed together until they seem opaque or dense. This makes the reading speed for such novels much slower than for the Victorian novel. While all words should be significant in any good text, the modernist novel makes the reader stop, slow down and

read more into the language. The novel is more self-conscious. The new sense of linguistic space means that there is more inside the language itself.

There are certain homologies between the modernist novel and the ideas of Freudian psychology, relativity and quantum physics—all of which saw space from the inside. These new ideas took time to filter through to the way people outside these specialist fields saw things, but the movement itself is the important thing to notice at this point. Another change in the sense of space related to the nineteenth-century expansion of European power in the shapes of imperialism and colonialism which moved outwards from Europe in terms of expansions of spheres of influence or political space. The collapse of this sense of space was not sudden or perceptible to the European writer as a flash of insight. It begins with the Paris Commune of 1871, with the collapse of the French Empire after the Franco-Prussian War and the aftermath inside the confines of Paris. What Emile Zola saw as a debacle, a chaotic destructive force, seemed at first to be an isolated incident to most thinkers. But not to Baron Haussman who redesigned the streets of Paris to open them by widening the boulevards to allow quick access to large numbers of soldiers who would be needed to quash any future revolt. This was a recognition that the political and social spaces of the old Europe were being transformed. While the European empires enjoyed their expansive phases, the dangers of such openness were not immediately felt. There were always the empty expanses of the empire and its colonies to alleviate any social pressures.

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From the passage in *The Sacred Fount* quoted above many typical proxemic aspects of the inner circle English novel may be illustrated. At the risk of seeming overly schematic, these aspects may be organized in terms of:

1. Narrative strategies.
2. The visual look of the text.
3. Psycho-geographical places.
4. Lexicogrammatical features.
5. Psycho-social qualities.
6. Dialogue, conversation and the personalization of voices.

Such a division of the proxemics of a novel is misleading as many aspects of one area may also be fruitfully discussed in terms of another area. In fact, the “blooming buzzing mess” of reality, to use Henry James’ brother William James’ phrase, is altogether entangled in an

implicate whole that is best understood by being experienced or lived. In terms of the study of language, and the language of the novel in particular, this living requires the reader to think and feel from an emic perspective as he or she reads and thinks about a text. Only then may the reader as a critic be in a position to write from an etic standpoint. This approach is basically ethnographic. As such, it is an empirical reading that moves through the space of a text in an anthropological or sociological way. Insofar as a critic tells the story of the people or characters one meets in a reading of a novel, that critic is in part a psychologist, a sociologist, an anthropologist, a geographer and a historian of language. We all too often overlook the fact that in the humanities we are all studying the same thing: human beings and what they do. Our task requires us to be all these things in a trans-disciplinary way if we are to see language, the novel, or any other thing that we study as a whole in the humanities.

Narrative Strategies

The unnamed narrator of James' novel seems to be talking to himself at times although there are hints that he is projecting a possible reader in such asides as "it was true" as though he is anticipating an objection from his reader. While he introduces himself as the "I" in the first sentence, he slips into the objective "one" as though his experience is meant to be taken as typical of what happens to anyone waiting for a train to depart. Yet, as the paragraph continues, the reader starts to sense that this narrator is not quite settled in his or her position as the subject of the story. In this way, James is preparing the reader's mind to respond to the narrator as an amorphous entity: the narrator remains unnamed throughout the novel, inviting a too literal reader to assume that the narrator is James himself.

The distance between the reader and the narrator is encouraged by the frame of mind James gives to the narrating consciousness. He distances from the people he sees on the platform: they "glower at" him; he has premonitions; he looks out for "possible enemies"; he revels in "happy ambiguities"; he generalizes from past experience how he often misjudges people he meets on the train to Newmarch; he sees Gilbert Long as an "element" whom he does not expect to be recognized by although they know each other, not as a person; he looks at his observations as a "case"; he seems to go out of his way to "breed fears" in himself; he tries to keep his distance from the people he sees, even trying to find a seat away from Gilbert Long.

These reactions suggest the "flight or fight" dilemma noted by Edward Hall (1966). The narrator is caught in a no-man's-land, in two minds about how he will relate to others. If

the reader relies on the narrator's projections about how people will react on the morrow, then the narrator's reticence or stand-offishness seems justifiable insofar as the reliability of first impressions is felt as a poor indicator of the way people will eventually bond.

In his opening paragraph, James takes an everyday act, catching a train, and makes it speak volumes about all the secret or hidden thoughts one has in such a place. By going into intricate detail, a familiar act is made much more problematical or filled with "rather happy ambiguities"; to use the narrator's language.

The Visual Look of the Text

In this particular passage, there is little that can be used as visual evidence of the exploitation of text space. The long opening paragraph is typical of a James story, as is the fact that the chapters are only numbered, not titled. What is notable in this paragraph is that it collects a lot of information that is only cohesive because of the narrator's peculiar or special point of view; the time shifts back to the past and into the future are often contained within a short or small space. The packing of apparently trivial information in the one paragraph gives the space a density and a sense of confinement.

Psycho-Geographical Places

The setting of the opening paragraph in a train station, probably Paddington Station in London, evokes a certain schema of train stations in turn of the century London. Such a setting evokes what Hall (1966) refers to as the centrifugal space which pushes people away from each other. Against this force, the narrator's consciousness seems to try to bring people together while preserving his distance from them as people.

One of James' characteristic strategies is to not describe the place in which action occurs in any real detail. This avoidance in part comes from his interest more in the mental states of his characters.

While the city of Birmingham is mentioned, the novel is not set there; we learn this from the narrator's mentioning of the fact that passengers will get off the train at Birmingham and so not go on to Newmarch. The concrete place is a red herring of sorts. We are left with the name of the house or place Newmarch which seems to be an allusion to George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*, thus evoking an intertextual schema in the reader. The common nouns such as "platform", "station", "compartment", "carriage", and "seat" are not described or qualified in a physical way. As spaces in a public place they are not interesting to

the narrator who doesn't seem to read much into their physical appearance. Nor does he describe Long in detail. The outer shell of things is of little interest to him as he is focused on the relationships between the people, anonymous strangers and acquaintances, as well as on his own internalized thoughts which the reader will gradually sense may be the narrator's own somewhat neurotic response to his surroundings where people are seen as furniture and elements.

We are not given any specifics about the distance between the people seen on the station; Long is seen "some way up the platform". By not making such distances concretely specific, James or the narrator creates the narrative space in which to play the game of looking at people from the outside while trying to read their personalities into their appearance. As the novel continues, the reader learns that this reading into people's appearances is the main source of entertainment at Newmarch which is initiated and encouraged by the narrator, often to the annoyance of his companions or conversation partners, when they discuss another character's love lives whenever they see that person walk into their field of vision. The surroundings in which this spotting occurs is not felt by the narrator to play any role in the interpretation of the subject of conjecture's physiognomy. The people being examined from a distance, behind their backs, so to speak, are discussable in part because they are viewed in a setting that has more in common with a romance landscape than the detailed setting of what up to James had been the predominant mode of rich description of place in the Victorian novel. By setting the bulk of the novel in a vaguely placed country house and by giving that house a personality of sorts in the first paragraph of the novel, James suggests that there is a quality to the house which mysteriously evokes such behaviour from the discussants. But this too is a red herring, as the house is not explored in the subsequent narrative in concrete detail.

Lexicogrammatical Features

The first sentence of the novel (quoted above) is not one we would expect to find in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook, perhaps because such sentences are usually regarded as not normal or representative in an EFL context. Most EFL learners would be lost in the sentence; or so it is often thought by those who write commercial textbooks.

Novelists understand that the beginning of their novels need to attract the reader's attention and look interesting; so they make their beginnings seem strange. This is part of their

style and has been commented on in terms of defamiliarization and foregrounding techniques since the time of the Russian Formalists.

A reader with a feel for English in both its spoken and written forms will probably sense that past the written form of this sentence there is a spoken voice; it sounds like it is spoken. In fact, it was. James dictated his novels to an amanuensis. The sentence is grammatically complex and has many more grammatical words than lexical words in it. While the sentence is grammatically correct, at least to my ear, there may be some readers of EFL and writers of computer programs such as *GrammarCheck* who would not accept or recognize this sentence's grammaticality.

The tension or relationship between the spoken and written feel of the sentence is a key element in James' writing which a reader should understand if that reader is to appreciate the James Effect: he uses a very public and often chatty language to talk about the most private or intimate things. His intimacy with his characters in part comes from the familiarity of his vocabulary.

While the syntax of this opening sentence in the novel may seem difficult to an EFL reader, the vocabulary hopefully should not. When we approach the sentence with an understanding that there is no such thing as a separate grammar from vocabulary, we may be sensitive to the way the syntax shapes the vocabulary and makes it do more than we would expect if we came to the words with only simplistic dictionary definitions of the words used in our mind. Shaped or worded another way: James says what seem to be the most simple of things in a way that seems anything but simple.

One of the ways James manages to read and write so much into the little situations he fondly describes or narrates is through his manipulation of these tensions between the public and private spheres and between the simple and complex elements of his lexicogrammar.

To return to James' opening sentence: there seem to be links between the various elements James packs into this sentence which announces one of the novel's themes which is the centripetal attraction and centrifugal repulsion the narrator feels towards others in his company. The two forces are joined together by "and". But this conjunction is immediately modified by the qualification of "even" to suggest that this additional possibility of finding people who may be enemies was not to be as expected as the possibility of finding possible friends. Here, James is starting to separate his words in a way that suggests similarities which are immediately modified as differences. Such qualification is actually introduced right at the opening of the sentence when the narrator qualifies his initial announcement of the "occasion" by adding the words "I felt"; others may not have felt this to be an occasion to do

what he does as he waits for the train to depart. But the occasion is actually a "prospect" or the anticipated view of a future party to be held at the destination the narrator is traveling to. The two words, "occasion" and "prospect" are semantically linked as synonyms.

James expands the semantic context of the utterance when he introduces another element: the visual meaning of "prospect" makes it more than just an "occasion" or special event. The history of the word "prospect" can be traced back at least to the beginning of the eighteenth century in English literature and to the writing of Pope. In this sense, the word evokes the country estates of the aristocrats the landscapes of which Pope helped to design.

The way James and his narrator pack the words of this sentence seems to elongate the sentence to suggest the elongation of prospects or views which we associate with the work of Pope and others who are landscape designers. The basic sentence may be reformulated as: "It was an occasion to look for others who might be going." While the actual sentence is much longer, it would be hasty to suggest that the rest of the sentence is Jamesian padding or an instance of what the poet T.S. Eliot referred to as James' "lose baggy monsters" of sentences. The distances James and his narrator introduce through the qualifications and amplifications suggest the tone of the subsequent narrative and the personality of the narrating character.

There is more information being included in the sentence which functions to suggest that the narrator is inside something, probably a railway carriage compartment, and is looking from the inside out. When we notice the collocation "look out", we have further options of interpretation; a "look out" is a place from which to admire the prospects of a landscape or natural view. It is also an act one may perform when one is aware of danger: we "look out" for danger or enemies more than for friends; when one is uncertain or in a threatening situation one is likely to be on one's guard. This tone is picked up with the conditional modification of the friends and enemies as "possible". In fact, the word "possible" becomes one of the novel's key words and characterizes many of the future exchanges the narrator will have with other characters in future conversations as they try to decide on the possibility of other characters having affairs with one another.

One of the overall effects of this usage of language is to suggest that the narrator enjoys this space he is creating for himself at the station and that this space is being suggested or embodied in the language he uses to introduce himself. Or rather, not to introduce himself; he never tells us who he is. He manages to avoid telling us even what his name is throughout the two hundred pages of his narrative. He hides himself in what will eventually seem to be a neurotic way. By the end of the novel, the narration reaches such a

neurotic pitch that it is brought to a close by Mrs Brissenden when she dismisses the narrator with the words "My poor dear, you are crazy and I bid you good-night."

Another element of this opening sentence is the closing verb "going" which is transitive but is used intransitively. The possible completions that suggest themselves at this early point are "going to be friends or enemies", "going to Newmarch" (the country estate where the novel is set), "going to join him in his carriage", "going insane", "going to play his game". Grammatically, the sentence itself is "going" to the following sentence, or the sentence next to it in the text:

> Such premonitions, it was true, bred fears when they failed to breed hopes, though it was to be added that there were sometimes, in the case, rather happy ambiguities.

There is a relation of parallelism between this and the opening sentence; but with notable variations and differences which function to draw attention to a certain opacity in the thinking of the narrator which is picked up or echoed in his use of the word "ambiguities". In place of the singular definite "occasion" we have the plural and vague "such premonitions" which anaphorically leads us back into the preceding sentence. Instead of the uncertain qualification of "I felt", we have the asserted and seemingly objective-sounding "it was true". This sense of certainty is modified or undercut by other words with senses of uncertainty and negativity: "premonitions", "bred" which has its own parallelism through being repeated, "failed" and even, perhaps, "ambiguities".

We start to become aware of the role of modality in James' writing which suggests in its ubiquity the tension of the narrating consciousness. These modalities are to be added by the narrator in ways that suggest his uncertainty and his sense of distance from what he is observing and interpreting. He (or she) is uncertain of his (or her) space or place in that space. This uncertainty is echoed in the qualifications and amplifications of the syntax and the lexical choices made. The reader may start to sense the bending of some words' semantics: are hopes "bred"; isn't this psychologically disturbing? The narrator is looking for ways of reading positive and negative meanings into the situation when looking for friends and enemies, hopes and fears: ambiguities. This strangeness is hinted at in the use of "was to be" instead of "should be" added. If it was to be added at the time when he was at the station and not now as he is recounting the experience in retrospect, then who was it to be added for? Himself? But, then we have to ask, who is he writing for? Not the readers, ourselves, but for himself. But then he seems to be back in the station when writing this

observation about his observation. This is one of the ways James spins his labyrinths as novels. The language in these two sentences turns in on itself to make itself more clear and exact, but in so doing, it actually makes things more complex for the reading consciousness. The grammar of the paragraph works to build a sense of the narrator as a rather distant, passive person: the passive voice of the opening phrases as well as in the references to being glowered at and spoken to. The narrator avoids saying that he himself actually does anything in the first three sentences by manipulating the use of the first person pronoun, thus inverting the clauses into statements of principle that any reasonable person would accept as normal behaviour. That the mental actions depicted in these sentences are not nearly as typical or normal is glossed over in this displacement of the narrating consciousness. The second sentence does not use a stated pronoun at all; rather, it implies one elliptically. And the third sentence slips into the academic (objective, impersonal, formal, inclusive, generalized) "one". Instead of becoming more prominent or centralized as the perceiver, the narrator is actually intentionally losing or hiding himself in the grammar. His sensitivity to the forces of centrifugal distance seems appropriate, given the theme of fight or fight that is emerging as the paragraph develops. This withdrawal also explains the lack of adjectives: only four are used in the paragraph (possible friends, possible enemies, happy ambiguities and the distantly collocated bleak sociability anticipated as a typical future effect).

Another effect produced in the paragraph is that the thoughts of the narrator are projected into the past and the future, away from the physical sensations or objects of getting on a train in the present. The first time we see him performing a physical action is in the last sentence of the paragraph when he stops in order to look for a seat away from Long. Things do not happen; that is the point. The intrapersonal interests of the narrator distance him from those around him. The preponderant types of processes he performs are mental ones. He withdraws into himself in order to reflect on the scene before his eyes. In this state of mind, he has "premonitions" of how unreliable his vision can be. His frequent qualifications of statements suggest his uncertainty in this public, exposed train station where he looks for anonymity which presages his own anonymity throughout the rest of the novel. It is as though he is so much looking inwards that he never thinks of looking at himself from the outside.

This tone is more in keeping with spoken language, where one relies on one's conversation partners to do the looking at you. The spoken quality of the writing, as discussed above, is marked by the predominance of grammatical words over lexical words in the paragraph. The effect of this assumed familiarity between the presumed or projected

reader and the narrator, while essentially a commonplace in spoken language, raises the issue of who we, the readers, are meant to be. By taking us immediately into his mind, the narrator avoids providing us with contextual information such as his name.

While the lexis is common and simple, it is anything but straightforward. The noun groups are not tightly packed, as one expects in written discourse. Instead, they are dispersed with qualifications and amplifications inserted in them in order to suggest the somewhat introverted nature of the narrator as he mentally performs his hiding act while he is physically looking for somewhere to hide from Long. By registering his perceptions of others, he leaves to the reader the job of looking at him and coming to terms with who he is as a character, or as he more impersonally calls people, an "element". The use of qualifications to interrupt the passive statements ironically distracts the reader's attention away from the observation being made and towards the observer.

Psycho-Social Qualities

Hidden or disguised in all this is the one more developed phrase which is given in its common collocational form: "the wish was father to the thought". Yet even this statement is modified by the preceding "It was not so much that". Not so much, but still a possibility. There is the element of scotoma in this writing. The narrator sees what he wants to see or expects to see, almost as though he is paranoid or making self-fulfilling prophecies. Again, we are given enough insight into him to start to doubt his reliability.

Many of the psycho-social qualities in this passage seem to fit Geert Hofstede's five dimensions of culture. Developed in part out of Hall's work, these dimensions are:

1. The individual or the group.
2. Power distance.
3. Uncertainty avoidance.
4. Masculine (assertive) versus feminine (modest) cultures.
5. Short or long term time frames.

For Hofstede, the Anglo-American cultures are more at the individual, low power distance, high level of uncertainty toleration, assertive and short term ends of the clines.

James' narrator's focus on his own perceptions of others, who for the most part are more or less impersonal elements or faces in the crowd, indicates his stress on his individuality and distance from the crowd; the crowd which is not named as such but only

registered as he shifts his gaze around at the station. He does not want to be a part of the crowd.

His concern with remaining aloof or distant, even from Gilbert Long, suggests his interest in maintaining a strong power distance from the people he observes. This distance is as much physical as it is mental. From this distance, he is free to play with his conjectures, his hopes and fears, without having to confront anyone with them at the station. From this distance, he is able to maintain a high degree of uncertainty toleration which is the source of his relish for ambiguities. Yet, he thinks that Long will not recognize him, so he tries to find a seat in another compartment of the train.

The passivity of his thought processes, as embodied in the lexicogrammar with the many modifications and qualifications he makes to his views, suggests that he is more modest or "feminine" in his responses to people; he does not seek to assert himself with others. In this way, he creates a safe distance, a flight space to use Hall's term, in which he can be happy in his ambiguities. As the novel develops he finds willing female cohorts in his search for the secret love affairs of others at Newmarch. In this, he is more at ease with women who are willing to play his game of reading, or gossiping about, people.

While the narrator is aware of how his views may change on the morrow when he arrives at Newmarch, he is focused at the station on the short term effects of his responses to the people he observes. This in part may be a result of his scanning of the crowd, looking for possible enemies and possible friends; people he can turn into one or the other as much as they can turn into one or the other by their own actions.

As the syntax folds in on itself and at the same time expands the clauses with modifications and qualifications, there is a sense that the narrator is uncomfortable with open spaces; he is in a way, agoraphobic. However, the effect on the reader who is trying to unravel his sentences is more one of claustrophobia. The narrator is unusually self-directed and takes the reader straight into his feelings and mental processes without any contextual explanations. The physical distances are there as centrifugal forces evoked by the setting of the paragraph on the train station. These are suggested by the shifting use of pronouns discussed above.

What is missing from James' narrator's consciousness is any sense of gender, class or race. He is not dividing his field of vision along those lines. In his world, such social spaces are not intrusive; they don't provoke any problematic for the observer. Implicitly, the narrator is a bourgeois or upper class male who associates with others from his class exclusively. Once

contact is made, as it finally is with Gilbert Long in another few hundred words of the story, a "prompt intimacy" (4) is established.

Dialogue, Conversation and the Personalization of Voices

Until that space he tries to prolong between himself and Long is filled in, the narrator's voice exists in his own mind as we hear him making his public and social interior monologues. While he mentions the possibility of being "spoken to", he also registers the fact that he is "glowered at" or pushed away by eye contact with others. All of this seems to fit the railway station schema. James exploits the ambiguities of this social space to keep his narrator at a distance from the reader. Future dialogues will happen, only not here on the station, in public. The public setting and the private thoughts exist in a tense relationship in James' prose which suggests a disturbing quality of the narrator's consciousness. His meandering thought process evokes his movement as he walks around on the platform looking at the other passengers and trying to predict their future relations to him.

In representing the narrator's internal thoughts first, James is providing a lot of contextual information which delays the introduction of recorded speech. While several of the pleasantries are reported by the narrator, the first actual words spoken occur nearly a thousand words later when a third "member of our trio" Grace Brissenden asks him "Didn't you really know?" (4) This proves to be a premonitory key question for the novel as the narrator finds after two hundred pages of conjectures that he really doesn't know the sacred fount source of other characters' rejuvenation.

By keeping recorded speech at a distance at first, James gives himself the space to expand his representation of the narrator's mind. The first words spoken between the characters are thus given a surprising and explosive effect. What in part ensures this delayed effect is the conversational tone of James' writing, his method of oral composition which is discussed above; the reader does not feel alienated from the narration because he is brought into an intimate space by the narrator's implication of the reader in his confidence from the first sentence which at the same time keeps the reader at a distance insofar as the narrator does not directly address the reader or respond to any possible concerns that a narrator working in the tradition of Sterne's Shandyisms would feel obliged to accommodate.

The ambiguities James creates in his story and its relations to the reader are also to be heard in the narrator's anamorphic vision on the station; he looks at the same scene from different perspectives and sees a different picture each time. Such a response is typical of

James' exploitation of point of view for dramatic effect in his novels. The example of Strether seeing two lovers in a boat in *The Ambassadors* (1903) is a case in point. In *The Sacred Fount*, the narrator sees his subjects as at times young or old depending as much on his own frame of mind each time he looks at them as on the context of the conversations he is having with others when he sees the metamorphosed subjects of his conjecture.

In creating these spaces in which perceptions are orally shaped James gives to his prose a synaesthetic feel which blends the senses by registering hearing visually or seeing with his ears. The archetype for this type of character in James' fiction is Nash in *The Tragic Muse* (1890) who is said to be a "reverberator" of other people's words and actions. Nash, like the anonymous and therefore partly empty or vague narrator of *The Sacred Fount* is a repository of others' perceptions which, through the ambiguities of his personal intricate interpretations, he is able to elongate, expand and change depending on the context he passively finds himself involved in. James' characters work by giving their dialogue partners the room in which to say what they think without intruding on those other characters. Whenever this room is invaded or dominated, there is a crisis in the more passive character which proves to be a pivotal moment in the novel. Here, Osbert's impact on Isabel Archer in *Portrait of a Lady* comes to mind.

Much of this synaesthesia is understandable in terms of the blending of oral and written discourses which, as Halliday points out, have their own lexicogrammars. The blending or synthesis of these two haptic or tactile languages characterizes the language of the novel as a hybrid of oral and written material. This should come as no surprise to a linguist or critic: all language is hybrid. It exists, as Halliday (2008) suggests, on a cline between the two complementarities of spoken and written language, lexis and grammar, and text and discourse.

The flexibility of James' prose gives him the space to create the richness of this artistic effect which works by altering the proxemic spaces in each situation that is perceived and represented in the story. James' art thrives in the distances and intimacies between the characters and between their public and private observations which are the novel's own environment. The social, psychological, lexicogrammatical, vocal and textual aspects of his work form an implicate order which defines his artistic achievement and shape the ways a reader interprets his work.

The particular ways James achieves this effect are the embodiment of his cultural significance. A close reading of James needs to recognize the ways his cultural schemata are materialized in his language in an organic shape which, while ever present, is rarely visible to

an impatient or overly imposing reader who misses the blending of the interpersonal, ideational and textual meanings as the shaping force of James' language.

In contrast to prevailing post-modernist views of novels as flat texts comprised of signs that can be antagonistically manipulated in any way as so much bric-à-brac, the reading of the novel offered here suggests that the novel is an acoustic space which, like other spaces in a culture's landscape, depends much on an awareness of the specific cultural schemata the novelist and the critic are trying to perceive and represent. When a reading of the novel is done co-operatively, as happens when the reader tries to see through the eyes and hear through the ears of the novelist and the characters in the novel (ethnographically), then the reading expands the text by interpreting it, much as sensitive anthropological, sociological, psychological or historical readings do of other material. In this ecological process, the observer (writer, critic or character) is transforming what is observed by participating in it.

In sociolinguistics this phenomenon is referred to as Labov's Paradox. Insofar as reading is absorbed into the novel itself, as James invites his readers to accept, the reader is able to expand the novel's language. This anamorphic reading will require that the critic brings into the reading as much of the schemata which are in the sociocultural environment of the novel and the novelist as possible through detailed research of the novel as an historical formation while at the same time making a very close reading of the novel's language. An ecological reading gets inside the text; it does not remain outside the text as an uninvolved or uncommitted theorist.

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The beginning of Rattawut Lapcharoensap's story "Sightseeing" (2005) reads:

> We're on the southbound train, the tracks swift beneath our feet, the windows rattling in their frames. The train crawls slowly down the archipelago, oceans bordering both sides of the tracks. To the ease, the Hunan runoff softens the soil, silt spilling into the ocean, turning the Gulf of Thailand brown. Mountains shield the west from the monsoons, leaving the leeward coast barren and dry, the Andaman Sea retaining its crisp cool blue. We're going through Prachuap Khiri Khan now, where the mountains recede briefly into a flattened plain, the sea pinching the peninsula into a needle. We are going through the slimmest part of the slimmest peninsula in the world, the Indian and the Pacific crashing against both shores. The earth is a tightrope; our train spins across the flat thin wire. They say that a century from now this will all be gone, that

> the oceans will rise above this threadbare patch of earth, creating a strait as narrow as Molucca, as fine as Gibraltar, yoking the oceans, severing the nation in two. I can't quite believe this because I never believe anything I won't be around to see. (71)

This reads as a travelogue, with the use of the present continuous tense and its picturesque details. As such, it is generically appropriate for an American or Western reader, who is the intended reader of the story. The problem for this study is that such a point of view is culturally and visually almost incomprehensible for a Thai. Thais do not see the scenery in this way. The writing is too symbolic and suggestive; not physical or detailed. Thais respond more with comments on the attractiveness of physical appearance as they stress the presentation of things, not their hidden meanings. To say this is not to belittle Lapcharoensap's writing; it is to recognize that he is turning Thailand into a culturally accessible thing for his American readers of English.

Elsewhere, he translates or transforms Thai language into American terms by calling people "madam" (92) referring to "pussy" (2), having mothers talk to their children as though they were grown up and using "*luk*" (child) as a second person pronoun which is not used by Thai mothers except when talking about their child in the third person, and blaspheming with phrases such as "for God's sakes" (80). No Chatuchak seller would refer to a female customer as "ma'am" (82) the nearest equivalent of which would be "*khun pooying*" (literally) "Miss or Mrs woman". Instead they would call a female "*pi*" (older person), "*bar*" (aunt) or *yai* (grandmother). Nor would a Thai call another Thai "you asshole" (120). In Thai, the words "*ai salalayo*" (you bastard) use the now archaic and rude very low class pronoun (*ai*) which is only used with very close friends or people one wants to seriously make angry. If one calls a Thai literally "asshole" (*doot*), one is actually saying that they are gay in the worst possible way which would be translated into English as "faggot". This may be how many American kids talk to each other, but not Thais. A Thai mother would hardly accuse her son half jokingly of "bonking" (2) a girl.

The way Thai customs and verbal interactions are rendered in the stories in "Sightseeing" do not actually depict Thailand from the inside, from a Thai perspective. Perhaps for a Western reader, the local colour of the places and people behaving like ill-mannered Westerners is attractive and sounds authentic because it offers back the image of the Thai as a mirrored version of a Westerner.

For these reasons, Lapcharoensap's writing seems to fit Said's model of how the West turns the Oriental into its own image. This may have been learned by the writer in his

university education in the U.S. and may explain his success there. But this tells us more about the dominant or hegemonic power and influence of learning English in the West and using it to change the East into a reader-friendly Western curiosity. He is writing American English well, but to do so, he has had to overlook the actual Thai experience of landscapes and life relationships.

Another, more authentic representation of the Thai world comes at the beginning of Pira Sudham's *Monsoon Country* (1993) when Kum Surin visits the village headman's place to inform him of the birth of a child:

> When the time was suitable, Kum Surin went to the house of the village headman and after meekly sitting down on the wooden floor, he said:
>
> "I've just had another offspring whom we've called Prem."
>
> The august headman reclining on the floor, half naked because it was a hot day, coughed spasmodically. Time seemed to stand still while he re-arranged his loin-cloth. Whether he minded very much being disturbed during his nap, it was difficult to see from his wrinkled face, but he sat up now, cross-legged, and spat into the spittoon nearby. To compose himself he ran his trembling gnarled fingers several times over his face and through his grey hair.
>
> Because the headman represented the officialdom of the world of masters, his authority commanded respect and awe.
>
> "The other day my wife . . .," Kum faltered, fearing that it was not time for him to speak.
>
> He checked himself and decided to remain silent until the old man was ready to listen.
>
> "Bring a tobacco tray and my shirt," the old headman demanded.
>
> This order with its tone of authority startled the visitor. Someone in the inner part of the house stirred, and the wood squeaked with the movement.
>
> "You're indeed fortunate to have another son," said the headman.
>
> The father of the new-born child sensed that the headman's voice was tinged with personal disappointment. The headman needed a son; all he had were daughters, and

> now his wife had passed the child-bearing age. This was why Kum had carefully worded his message. He had thoughtfully chosen the word "offspring" so as to avoid reminding the influential man of his misfortune. Not to have a son to carry on the family name was considered a retribution for some misdeed done in the past. For this reason Kum, who was just another impoverished peasant of Napo, feared to put himself above the man who had been made a master. (21–23)

This is written from a Thai, Kum Surin's, point of view. We see from his point of view only what he sees and feels. The writing is simple and concrete to reflect his way of looking at the world around him. When this passage is compared to the passage from Lapcharoensap quoted above, it may look at first glance or reading to be simplistic or threadbare: the rhetorical flourishes and verbal pyrotechnics of the Westernized writer are alien to the work of Sudham who is immersed in the Thai world as he writes. While a young, clever Western educated person who wants to write "poetically" may have the thoughts registered on the train, no young student on his way to a Rajabhat or technical college up north would actually see, speak, think or write with such *élan* as the first person narrator of the "Sightseeing" passage does. In contrast, Sudham sees the actual proxemic qualities of the space he is describing and embodies them in his narrative. The simplicity of Kum the illiterate peasant, his hesitations and awkwardness, are reflected in the prose which is filled with little considerations that are important to a Thai in his situation as he visits the headman of his village.

This simplicity of style focuses narrative attention on the writing of Prem's name in the book of power. He does not exist in society until he is officially registered by the headman as a member of the village. This means much in Thai culture: when one is registered in a particular place, one remains bureaucratically linked or tied to that place for the rest of one's life, even if one moves away to another place in Thailand. Prem is in this way forever situated in the village of Napo. This in part prepares the theme of his need to return to his birth place that shapes the rest of the novel. As the first thing that happens to Prem in the novel, this social or political ritual of the writing of his name in a book is mirrored or paralleled in the writing of his name in the book of the novel itself. The two acts of writing are thus related proxemically in the scene.

This effect would have been lost if the novelist narrator Sudham had self-consciously tried to show off his language by writing in a more sophisticated way. His point is that despite the apparent simplicity and unsophisticated manners of the events and people, there is actually a deeply meaningful level to the narrative: even peasants can be seen in clever ways

without turning them into replicas of Western scholars, arty writers, or bourgeois characters a Western reader can easily identify with and admire.

To understand what is happening in this episode, one needs to understand Thai culture, especially as it is found in Esarn villages. So much is hinted at by Sudham which is implicit in the communication situation embodied in the language.

The timing of Kum's visit is "suitable"; if he had gone too soon, the headman, who has no son, may have thought that he was boasting of having a son. Kum behaves meekly sitting on the floor in a subservient position in the headman's house. As such, he is being *kriengjai* or signalling his awkward unwillingness to impinge on the headman's space. He is careful not to place his head above or higher than the head of the headman. This lowering of one's body in a more powerful person's space or when one is impinging on another's space is called *gomhua* (literally to lower the head).

He does not take up space which would have suggested that he thought he had power or was better than the headman. He only enters the public part of the headman's house. The headman's servant or wife is in the "inner part of the house". Avoiding saying that he has had a son, he gets to the point of his visit by referring to his son generally and therefore indirectly as "offspring". Kum's demeanour is one of respect and awe in the presence of the unnamed headman's power. The headman's position is his name. For a Thai, the power of the man gives him an almost magical presence; his *saksit* (ritual) role is to be responded to impersonally by Kum who does not try to strike up a conversation with him. As Mulder (1979) points out, for a Thai such power is to be controlled by right ceremony. In this situation, Kum is afraid to make a mistake in speaking at the wrong time. His language falters and he breaks off his sentence, "The other day my wife . . ." The vagueness of the time reinforces the vagueness of his initial announcement that he has "just" had an offspring. The fact that "someone" responds to the headman's demand for assistance from elsewhere in the house but we do not see this person also evokes the sense of mystery and awe which is how the Thai peasant would understand the workings of power.

The headman's power is represented with words such as "old", "demanded", "order" and "authority". Kum is "startled" by the "tone" of the headman's voice and speech act. We feel his awkwardness in this situation as he waits for the headman to put on a shirt and have his smoking paraphernalia placed in front of him so that the social ceremony can begin. In the Thai world, the voice is synaesthetically conceived as part of one's presentational face. The headman's voice can be seen as "tinged" with regret. This presentational value is central to Thai culture, as Mulder (1979) has described it. To look the part is often more important

than being the part. Social power is external, not to be impinged on by asking personal questions.

The long last paragraph takes the reader into Kum's thinking after the episode of writing his child's name in the government register has been completed. Ceremonial or public roles are separated from private thoughts. All the various social implications of the scene are unfolded in the end and we see the complex network of meanings behind the scene we have just witnessed: the Buddhist belief in the force of karma punishing the headman for prior misdeeds and the implicit rewarding of Kum with "another" son; Kum's fear of saying the word "son" and his "carefully worded" information which avoids the word that would seem to challenge the headman's karmic power.

Everything is in the way the words are spoken; when and how they are said. The two men do not address each other by name or position as power is anonymous in such situations. While Kum is "just another impoverished peasant of Napo" and a "visitor", the headman is an "influential man". By not naming the headman with his family name, Sudham is bringing out or stressing the face that the headman's family name will disappear with his death.

The exchanges between the two men are laconic or sparse. Kum is in the headman's place to give him a "message", not to strike up a conversation. What is important is the power relationship between them which is expressed by their body language and the space between them. By using short paragraphs for most of the scene, Sudham breaks his narrative and its language up to reflect these forces. The vocabulary used to describe the two men reflects the fact that *umnart* (ritual) power is anonymous and to be kept at a distance with appropriate language and physical actions. Easily offended, it demands appropriate behaviour which is on the presentational plane, not the personal one. The novelist's attitude to this scene is suggested by his description of the "august" headman; the word is deliberately inappropriate to the man we see spitting and coughing as he lies half naked on the floor in a sleepy haze as he was having a "nap" and runs his "trembling" fingers over his face to "compose" himself for the ceremony. By not referring here to the headman as "Headman", Sudham is quietly subverting that person's authority by denying him his actual title while registering the anonymity of his power. Although *umnart* power is with the headman, *bunkun* power, moral force, is with Kum, the lowly peasant who is "fortunate" (the headman's word) to have a son.

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To return to the series of propositions enumerated above: by discussing the ways James, Lapchaoreonsap and Sudham write their fictions, some important characteristics of the ways they see space as a cultural force and as a hidden language have been highlighted or foregrounded.

1. To understand what is written, we need to visualize the spaces assumed by the writer as schemata that the reader should bring to a reading of the text. While such knowledge is a matter of research to be done by the teacher and the students, the language of the text being read offers a lot of information which can be activated by a close and careful reading which looks at the ways characters and the writer or narrator organizes and communicates information.
2. How and why characters or narrator writers say what they do is motivated by their communication strategies. These strategies are implicitly and explicitly stated in the text. When a reader looks at the communication situations in a novel or any other text as real life communication situations, then that reader brings the language used to life. Such language then exists as an expression of the deep social semiotic that shapes all language in use as actual utterances. The act of reading or writing is a social one that brings with it certain forms of linguistic action which in part are shaped by the formal and informal rules of communication embedded in the genre being activated by the writer. We all use words to create and describe the spaces we need in which to communicate. How near or far we are to the people we communicate with influences how we use language. The lexicogrammatical choices we make or highlight when we read and write reflect our own cultural assumptions about what are appropriate and comfortable distances for us.
3. To gain access to a fiction's world is to find paths into the cultural spaces which, through organic environmental relationships (the ecology of a text), form a world that mimetically embodies social reality. Even post-modernist fictions, ironically perhaps, do this when they represent a post-modern view of how things often fail to connect in traditional ways. This means that whenever we use language, we always bring with us our own cultural beliefs and forms of action.
4. Every usage of any language is shaped by the speaker's and listener's world view. This image we have of the world, insofar as it defines how we see the distances between ourselves and others, influences the ways we overcome or reject the power distances, the degree of uncertainty about a specific communication situation we are prepared to deal with, the degree to which we avoid conflicts or disagreements with those we communicate with, our willingness to look for meaning within ourselves, or within groups or

relationships with us as a collaborative activity, and the time we are prepared to accept in order to see how a fiction opens up or closes in on itself are all influenced by the schemata we bring to reading.

5. Sensitive cultural reading looks at the relationships evoked between the writer and the narrator, the writer and the reader, the characters themselves, the narrator and the characters, etc. How we talk to each other in these discourses creates the shapes of the spaces and influences our interpretation of those spaces. These are the spaces that create and change our actual social relationships as readers and writers. And who we are is embodied in these spaces as participants in the literary production, exchange and consumption processes.
6. There is a zone of proximal development to be identified in every text we read. The writer evokes or communicates the schemata we need to have in order to understand the text. In this stimulation of our imagination, the writer acts as an educator teaching us how to read the text which has its codes of reading behaviour implicit in the form of the language that creates the text's body. Much of this acculturation to each specific text comes at the beginning of the work; hence the importance of looking at what is happening in such places and spaces in the texts examined above. Much of this can be taught in terms of the ways a writer foregrounds information through the language used and by how he or she reforms the reader's expectations through defamiliarizing the reader so as to push the reader back away from old habits and so open the reader's mind to possible new or other ways of seeing the world being represented in the text.
7. Language externalizes our inner mental spaces where we often unconsciously activate certain schemata, beliefs and knowledge of the way the world is meant to work. By using language, we show others how our own mind and world work, or what they look and sound like to us. When they read us or we read them, we see each other's mental spaces embodied in the language as discourse. This is a form of open communication whereby we share with others our private and public lives. In this way, we show ourselves to the world and affirm our significance as human beings who contribute to the communication processes.
8. The little alternative or theoretical worlds that are fictions make sense to us insofar as they are coherent and cohesive; they make sense to us when we recognize them and we recognize them when we can recognize ourselves and our roles in them. The medium for these qualities is the lexicogrammar of the texts. As the texts expand while we read them, so do they expand our reading schemata and so prepare us for future encounters with other

worlds and cultures. We then develop the scaffolding of extensive reading which seems to go along with reading a text in depth. What it means to get into a text deeply is largely a matter of cultural literacy. This literacy is primarily a matter of recognizing how space and time are fundamental categories of experience and language.

9. The reading space is dynamic and in flux at all times. When we read or write, we are at the same time transforming the text's culture. Through spoken and written language as well as by paralinguistic means (such as the text's body language and tone) we change the world as that world is represented or embodied in the text we create as we read and write. Reading is as creative as writing. Until the reader accepts his or her power to determine much of what is significant in a text, the distance between the reader and the text will he centrifugal; it will push the reader out of the text and so make reading more mechanical. As such, reading becomes difficult, boring and irrelevant.
10. When we approach a text ecologically, as a real world communication act, we experience the text as a dissipative experience; some of our conjectures prove to be unhelpful or misleading while other thoughts change the way we interpret the text as we read or think about it. Such a loss of energy is a natural part of the heuristic process. It is also non-linear as we cannot automatically find a path of least resistance without returning to what we have already read in light of what we subsequently read. As a result, texts are open-ended systems of sorts. A writer who tries to close a text is cutting the reader off as a communicant in order to tell the reader what to think in absolute terms, as the one-best-meaning of his or her text. As we enter the open space of a fiction, the material self-organizes when new lexis or communicative acts are included. Such new material reorganizes the meanings to be discovered in the writing. One important thing a reader brings to a reading is his or her own culture. The ways that culture interacts with the culture of the writer creates feedback loops in the text which expand or contract the various environments that are embodied in the plot and characterization of the novel. This feedback also creates an instability in the communication process as it develops between the reader and the writer which is often experienced as vagueness of language which only becomes clear later and in the political, social and psychological power structures that all communication exploits on the inter-personal level. The lexicogrammatical embodiment or expression of this flux may be understood as fractal utterances which need to be studied in close detail as every word matters in an ecology of language. When one word changes, so do the rest of the words it relates to. There is a sensitive dependence on this environment and this dependence is largely determined by the initial conditions we meet

in that environment at the beginning of the text as well as in its background which we must research. Other strange attractors are the cultural assumptions the reader and the writer bring to a text. To a variable degree these assumptions are the hidden language of proxemics which shapes the ways we realize, utilize and change the spaces in the text, depending on the sociocultural roles we see for ourselves as readers and writers. A deep understanding of these roles brings us into close proximity with our ideologies which are lived experiences as much as they are linguistic fabrications or fictions we think we live by. When we make these darknesses visible, as we do when we write or speak, they are real phenomena that can be seen and heard. As such, reading can be experienced concretely as something that matters in our world because we can change that world instead of just accepting it in someone else's interpretation which can only really communicate that other person's experience, not our own.

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In conclusion: While the readings of fictions from different cultures offered here may seem alien to an English teacher only trained in mainstream ELT methodologies, the arguments made are based on classroom experience where L2 speakers of English have encountered specific barriers to the development of their language skills in general and to their reading skills in particular. Many of the issues raised in the theory of reading in ELT revolve around concerns for the difficulty, authenticity and relevance of the texts being taught. In the English as an L2 environment, the problems faced by the students are compounded by the regrettable but understandable fact that many L2 English teachers feel that they lack enough skills in mastering reading, writing and communicating in English.

We need to look at the teachers' cultural and social knowledge, and the importance of space in the schemata such teachers may or may not have in English. When this space is approached as part of the way we educate teachers, then the role of culture in such education is of paramount importance. In place of the often trivial input regarding information about the London Tube or how to order a hamburger, a deeper understanding of the wider culture of language should be stressed. This broad and deep knowledge is the "passport" to a "foreign" student or a teacher inhabiting the English language by absorbing not only the L1 cultures of the U.S. or the U.K. but the relationships of similarity and difference between those cultures and the growing cultures of their countries as they increasingly interconnect with yet other cultures. An example of the expanding complexity of this cultural environment

is the growing realization, at least in Asia, that Thais have to learn how to relate to Chinese, Japanese or Indians, etc. in English. This means that the Asian learner needs to get inside these cultures through the English language.

By approaching communication in terms of the dimensions of space and time, we are able to understand how and why speakers or writers say the things they do by making their worlds visible and audible as material presences in their languages. In this way, language is no longer predominantly an abstract matter of memorized rules and tactics which are mechanically learned and applied in the real world often in damaging ways that impede the success of attempts to communicate meaningfully with people from other cultures.

While many teachers seem to be aware of the fact that language is a changing thing, they do not really look for ways of helping their students experience this flux or metamorphosis. When students are cut off from experiencing this force, they are alienated from the worlds of English and are lost in the ever widening gaps or spaces between literate speakers of English and the rest of the world which uses English. Writers such as Pira Sudham show us ways of shaping any culture in English while remaining responsive to their own cultures and how those other cultures can be absorbed into their language in powerful and creative ways.

By designing courses which begin with cultural shapes familiar to the students, teachers may build the scaffolding for their students to develop their reading skills of other, less familiar texts. The similarities and differences between various texts, such as those observed in terms of the three writers discussed above, leads to a critical cultural literacy which empowers the students as contributors to the development of English as a *lingua franca* in Asia.

As English morphs through the bringing into it of other cultures and languages, the need for such literacy skills will only increase. Without such skills, the globalized language world will become more centrifugal as misunderstanding and misconceptions about others' cultures roles and positions in English becomes politicized negatively as some will feel their own cultures are marginalized at the expense of other cultures which they do not understand as they have no way of accessing the deeper levels of those cultures as they are embodied increasingly in the Englishes that are increasingly surrounding them and defining who they are. The inner and outer circles of English as described by Kachru, are not permanent fixtures; as the economic and political forces that shape our environment change, so will the power relations between speakers of English. These relations are sociocultural, not a fixed set of mechanical rules to be memorized and regurgitated as facts that never change.

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